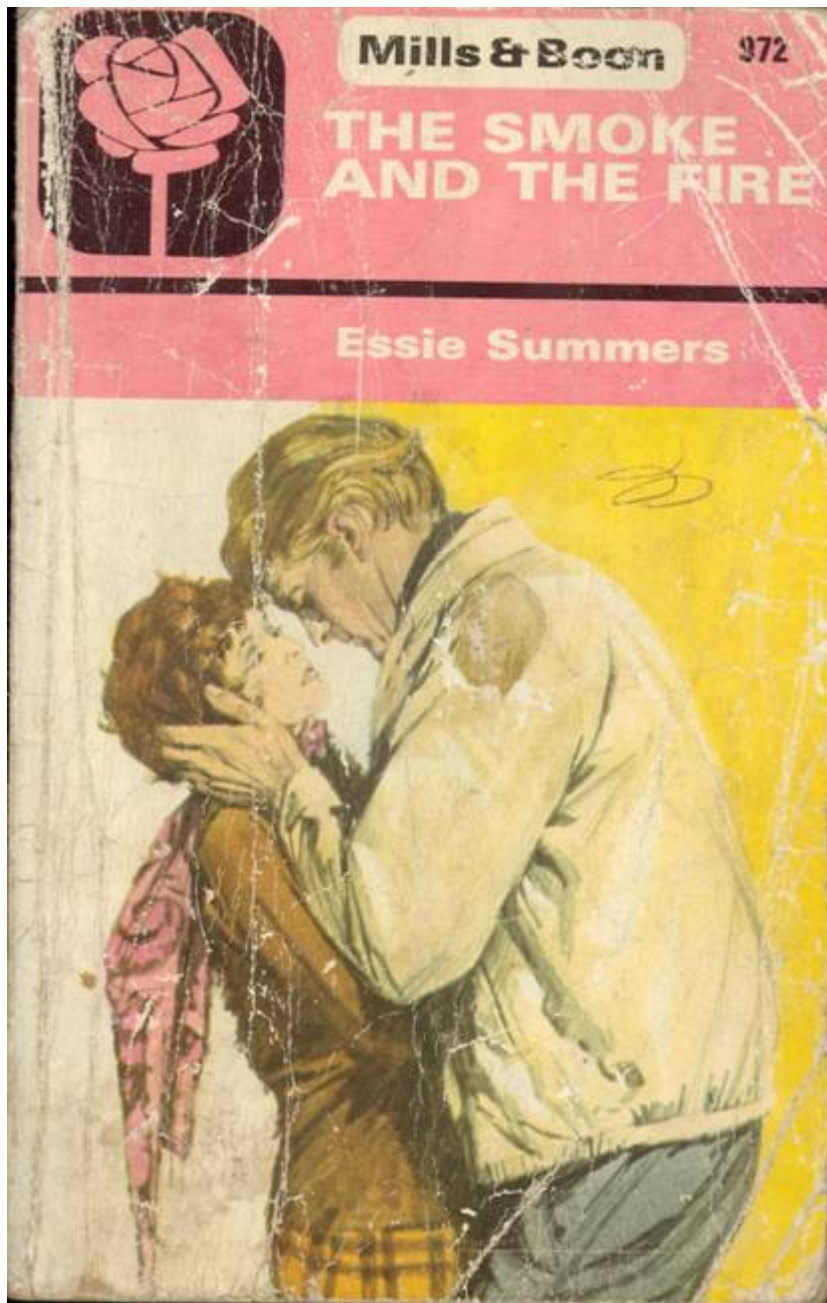


The Smoke and the Fire

Essie Summers



CHAPTER ONE

DINAH had been exactly a week and a day in New Zealand. Wales and the rest of her twenty-three years were four months away, and in about five minutes Russell would be here and a whole new world would open up for her.

She had expected the advent of that new world eight days ago when their ship had berthed in Wellington. She had searched the faces of the throng of people on the wharf so hungrily till the telegram was handed to her. Russell and his mother were in Wanganui attending an aunt's funeral and it would be best for Aunt Kate and Dinah to proceed straight to Dunedin.

Dinah still had the odd feeling that Aunt Kate had been rather pleased about the postponement of the reunion. Though why? Except that it had given the two of them a chance to find their own quarters in Dunedin.

Aunt Kate had gone into unexpectedly fast action, and in five days they were actually the owners of this house here on the heights of Belleknowes; overlooking the beautiful Otago Harbour.

Aunt Kate had merely said, crisply, to explain her haste, 'Oh, it's much nicer to meet people on your own ground, Di.'

Di had blinked, laughed, and said gently, 'Aunt Kate, darling, this isn't a football match ... and they aren't people. Just Russell and his mother.'

A car purred up Queen's Drive, came into sight as it turned uphill. Would that be Russell's? How odd that she didn't even know what make of car he drove! Oh well, it was going to be exciting discovering all the things she didn't know about him, and with the sensible proviso that it must be six months before they became formally engaged, they had plenty of time.

Dinah's heart soared like a bird in flight. It was here, this moment when she and Russell were really meeting, never really to part again. What a six months this would be ... planning their own house, going

round the agents to see if their dream house already existed; if not, buying a section, one with a view, she hoped, like this one.

The thoughts flashed into Dinah's mind as she raced down the steps, the glorious present and the still-more-glorious-to-be future mingled into one in eager anticipation, all crystallized into the beauty of this day in the Southern Hemisphere. The sun glinted on Russell's black hair as he got quickly out of the car, removed his hat, glanced up for the first glimpse of Dinah's flying figure. Russell, after all these months, dear and familiar.

He sprang up the last few steps to meet her, caught her hands, said, 'Oh, Dinah!' and kissed her... All the disappointment of not seeing Russell last night when he and his mother had arrived back in the South melted from Dinah's heart. He was here. The first time she had seen him in his own country.

He looked up appreciatively at the house above them, low and bright and modern on its sun terraces.

'My word, darling, your aunt seems to have chosen well. I was a bit rattled last night when you said she'd already bought. It sounded just the crazy sort of impulse an artist might have. I was terrified you'd bought a pig in a poke and wished you'd waited till I got back. Lawyers know a fair bit about property and I wouldn't like you to be diddled. Agents are sharks, my love.'

Dinah was quite surprised to find herself saying quite shortly, 'This agent wasn't a shark. He was a pet. He went to no end of trouble to explain local details and drawbacks and so on to us'.

Russell chuckled. 'All geared, no doubt, to making the sale he wanted to. Never mind, it certainly looks nice, and at least it's new. You might have been gulled into buying an old house needing a lot spent on it. Yet to you it wouldn't have seemed old, coming from England. And an old brick house is better than an old wooden.'

Dinah hesitated. 'Russell - don't say anything to take away any of Aunt Kate's pleasure in owning a house like this, will you? She's like a child with a new toy. And she loves the bright colours of the newer houses here, that's why she wanted wooden. It pleases the artist in her. She's loving this, especially the fact that it's so new and convenient. Aunt Kate has always made do. Our houses were always too big and rambling, she's never had the time she should for her painting, and she was so good to Dai and myself when Mother died. And her own husband was sick a long time. It was so good of her to come out with me like this - a tremendous uprooting for anyone her age. So it's been a great thrill to me that she's fallen so completely in love with Dunedin. She says it's most paint-worthy. I still worry for fear she misses her fellow-artists too much.'

'Oh, don't worry, Dinah. If she does she can always go back to Wales after she sees us married. This would be an easy house to sell.'

Dinah caught her breath. 'I don't want her to go back, Russell.'

They were at the front door. 'Aunt Kate, here he is .. '

Aunt Kate appeared. 'Oh, hullo, Russell. What do you think of all this?' She waved a hand that made a comprehensive inclusion of house and garden, the bush, the harbour, the open sea.

He responded as Dinah hoped he would. 'Simply charming, Mrs. Livingstone. I would say you made a very good buy. It's certainly a sun-trap here, with windows practically covering the east and north walls.' They were into the hall and through into the living-room by now. 'My word, I must say that you've managed to get it remarkably tidy in a very short time.'

'Yes, it was a godsend you weren't here; gave us a chance to settle in.'

Dinah suppressed an exclamation of rue. That wasn't the most tactful thing to say.

Aunt Kate swept on, 'In fact I was so pleased you didn't see fit to dash over last night when you and your mother got home. We got a terrific lot done.'

Dinah blinked. She could have sworn last night that Aunt Kate had been really surprised that Russell hadn't rushed over. It had been only eight-thirty when he rang. But his mother didn't travel well, he'd said, and he didn't care to leave her.

Aunt Kate said, 'Come out on to the back sun-room and have a cup of coffee, Russell.'

'Oh, I won't bother, thanks. I had one with Mother half an hour ago.'

'And you really can't take another? Dinah and I can take coffee any time.'

'No. You see, I'd like to take Dinah over home right away.'

'Oh, Dinah must have one. She's had nothing since breakfast and she's been working like a Trojan, trying to get things straight for you. Come on, and I'll pour out. It's all ready. Sit down, Russell. Here's your coffee, Di.'

Dinah noticed that Russell sat on the edge of his chair.

Maybe his mother made a fetish of punctuality. Oh well, it was a good thing where punctuality was necessary. But no time had been mentioned this morning. Dinah decided to put it down to an impatience to see the girl who would probably marry her son.

She drank her coffee quickly. 'No, not another biscuit, thanks, Aunt Kate.'

Russell rose. 'I'll bring Mother over to see you very soon, Mrs. Livingstone.' He turned to Dinah. 'Will it take you long to change, dear?'

'Oh, I'm ready except for a jacket, Russell. This skirt and overblouse are part of a suit. I got it in New York.'

Russell said slowly, 'Yes, I thought it looked American.'

Dinah had a line between her brows as she left the room.

That hadn't - for some absurd reason - sounded complimentary. She hesitated - should she ask him

what he meant? - decided against it, went to her room.

The jacket was russet and above it her hair gleamed like a newly minted penny. The overblouse was a rich green, matching the bold checks of the slim-fitting skirt and the green of her eyes.

She supposed in this happy-go-lucky country it wasn't at all necessary to wear a hat, but as she had an interview this afternoon with the man she had strong reason to believe would become her employer, perhaps she should.

They drove up to Highgate, a road that ran right along the crest of a steep hill above the city, from Roslyn to Maori Hill. Dinah's beauty-loving eyes feasted on it all. On the other side the hill dropped down to Kaikorai Valley, only to climb again to new housing areas on other hills till the houses lost themselves in the forestry of Three-Mile-Hill where it dipped down to the Taieri Plains. South, the valley stream flowed out to Brighton on the coast, with Saddle Hill; aptly named; guarding it.

They came into an older residential area, into a select crescent, a pleasant little backwater, and drove into a dark tunnel of a shrub-bordered drive, pulling up before a two-storey brick house.

Russell took her in through the front door. Dinah expected him to call out eagerly, 'Here she is, Mother,' and to hear the sound of eager footsteps, but they went sedately through to a drawing-room in the side of the house.

Mrs. Milgrove was rather older than she had expected, but very elegant in a slightly old-fashioned, restrained way. She was standing by an exquisite creation of spring flowers, backed by a stiff fan of flax leaves, adding a last touch to it.

She came forward, took the tips of Dinah's outstretched, eager fingers and, squeezing them a little, said, 'How are you, my dear? How interesting to meet you.'

Interesting. Not how glad she was. Nor what a thrill to meet you after all my son has said. Dinah pulled her thoughts up. The woman could be nervous. It must be a frightful ordeal meeting the girl your son hopes to marry, wondering if she will make him happy, stand by him through thick and thin, especially someone he has met and fallen in love with fourteen thousand miles away.

Mrs. Milgrove took her to a guest-room to remove her hat, drawing up the blinds.

Dinah crossed to the mirror, fluffed up her hair. The sun struck fully on her. She was acutely conscious of the older woman's eyes upon her. Dinah's eyes flickered to the mirrored Mrs. Milgrove's eyes and in that unguarded moment was aware of hostility, dislike. It had gone by the time Dinah swung round to follow her hostess. Dinah told herself she was getting imaginative.

Mrs. Milgrove stopped to lower the blinds again. The sun is so strong here in New Zealand it fades the bedspreads and rots the curtains if one is not careful.'

Dinah nodded. 'Yes, it must. But we're just revelling in all this sun. I hope the fabrics in our house are fadeless, that's all.'

'You'll be wise to draw your blinds for most of the day, though.'

Dinah doubted if they would. She was seeking around already for something to talk about.

'I expect that's why all the shops have verandas on them. I hadn't thought of that. To stop the sun fading the goods through the glass. I thought it was to keep shoppers from getting wet in the rain. It was the first difference I noticed. That, and the lack of bowler hats. I haven't seen single one since we came to Dunedin. Or one man carrying an umbrella.'

'Russell always wears a hat,' said Mrs. Milgrove. Conversation languished. Dinah thought bewilderedly that this was probably the first time in her life she had been at a loss for words, or shy. And it was fatal to start thinking: what can I talk about next?

But lunch would help, surely. Dinah took herself to task.

Lots of people improved on acquaintance. What would she be most interested in? Her flowers, for one thing. Russell for another.

Dinah said hurriedly, 'What a knack you have with flowers.'

Mrs. Milgrove unbent a little, said, 'It had to be learned. I attended classes. I feel it's an important part of Russell's world, part of the entertaining.'

'Yes, a very important part,' Dinah agreed thankfully.

She loved flowers for their own sakes, enjoyed arranging them. They came back to the, drawing-room. Dinah continued, 'My aunt paints flower studies. It's one of her specialities.'

'Oh, does your aunt dabble a little?'

Dinah grinned. 'Dabbling isn't exactly the word. It's Aunt Kate's whole life. She's charmed with the studio she's made for herself in theHarcourt Street house.'

Russell broke in. Dinah thought she detected a faint note of apology. 'Mrs. Livingstone doesn't do impressionist stuff, Mother, or anything like that. You'd like her pictures, they're landscapes, flowers, interiors.'

Mrs. Milgrove said nothing. Dinah had an idea she had a talent for saying nothing in a very heavily emphasized way.

Russell said easily, 'That's how we met - at an art exhibition.'

'Yes, of course, son, you told me all about it.'

Dinah had inner reservations. She doubted if he had told her all. She had an idea that the way Russell had scraped acquaintance with her could easily be a bit out of character as far as Mrs. Milgrove knew her son.

Russell's mother lifted her heavy lids, looked directly at Dinah.

'I hope you thought it a good idea, my dear, to wait six months before announcing anything formally. I know to youth time seems long, but a little chance of weighing things up can often save heartbreak later on. Or regrets. Nothing is to be gained by rushing into things.'

Dinah's chin came up just a fraction. 'Oh, it had already been decided on when your letter arrived, Mrs. Milgrove. My aunt and you must be kindred spirits on that. She was very much against a quick announcement. She felt it entirely too risky for any girl to judge a man on a very brief acquaintance - and out of his own country too. She wanted to see what Russell's background was - that was why she came too.'

Mrs. Milgrove stiffened. It was one thing to have this girl out to look over and another thing to have this aunt question the eligibility of Russell.

'Russell's background is impeccable. His greatfather came out on the *Philip Laing*. He founded a banking business here.'

'Very nice too.' Dinah's tone was as smooth as cream. 'But of course Aunt Kate could scarcely judge that, merely on his appearance. You don't mind, do you, Mrs. Milgrove, that my aunt was just as cautious as you? I thought that would have been an attitude you would have approved.'

Dinah saw Russell shoot his mother a glance. Whether it was indignant or appealing she did not know, but at least Mrs. Milgrove said hastily, 'Yes, of course. Most sensible and commendable. It was just that I hadn't realized that the whole idea of coming out here first wasn't entirely mine.'

Dinah felt a rush of sympathy for Russell. The poor lamb.

He needed to be married, to be rescued from this stiff and starchy atmosphere. A pang shot through her. She had so loved every other New Zealander she had met. Even the dustmen were the friendliest folk, and so interested in her reactions to a new country. She'd hoped Russell's mother might have been typical ... democratic, informal, easygoing, eager to know and like her. But no quick judgments, Dinah, Dad didn't believe in them. Mrs. Milgrove might improve on knowledge.

Lunch was beautifully served. Mrs. Milgrove must have spent some time preparing it, and it was very good of her when she had just returned from a trip that naturally had been one of sadness and strain. Dinah tried to relax.

Mrs. Milgrove would not let her help with the dishes.

They were placed on a tea-wagon and wheeled into the back regions. Of course that was sensible enough. It left them more time to get to know each other, if you could call it that.

And Russell had to be at the office at two.

'That will give Dinah and me some time together alone, said Mrs. Milgrove graciously.

Dinah said, 'I'm sorry. I should have said I have an appointment in the city at three. With someone I hope will become my future employer.'

Russell looked disappointed. 'Oh, must you start working right away, Dinah? Aren't you going to give yourself time to look round first?'

'Well, this was such a golden opportunity, Russell. I met this man's father in Montreal. He and his wife are on a world tour. He said his son badly needed a secretary like me ... I sent him my references two days ago. But they won't keep the position open too much longer. He said the references all but clinched it and wants me to see him this afternoon. He's Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan of Bryn-Morgan and Sons, Drapers.'

The effect on her hearers was strange. What on earth could be the ...

Mrs. Milgrove recovered first. 'You can't work for Anthony Bryn-Morgan, my dear, he's not a nice man at all!'

Dinah swallowed. 'No?' Her tone held disbelief. 'But his father and mother are simply wonderful people.'

'They are ... well enough. Well respected. But the son isn't. He's a - he's a rake!'

Dinah blinked. She thought rakes had gone out with the eighteenth century and powdered hair, but it would never do to say so, even laughingly. She doubted if Russell's mother had a sense of humour.

'But - but that needn't matter, need it? I thought he sounded very nice too. His father told me something about his son's progressive ideas for staff welfare and so on. Are you sure you were not mistaken?'

'Mother isn't mistaken.' Russell's tone was reminiscent of the strong hand in the velvet glove. 'I think you'd better scrub it, Dinah. I wouldn't be at all happy to have you working at close quarters with Anthony Bryn-Morgan.'

'But why? Being a man's secretary, even if he is a - a rake, doesn't mean to say you're going to allow him to seduce you!'

Dinah's chuckle died into a silence. She realized she had made a blunder. Mrs. Milgrove didn't like her flippancy. Dinah felt a blush coming up and resented the blush. It might look like shame, and it wasn't. It was anger.

Mrs. Milgrove said quietly, 'I think we'll consider that unsaid.' She waited, hands on lap, for the obvious apology.

It didn't come.

Russell cleared his throat. Poor Russell. He said, 'Dinah darling, you don't seem like yourself. Listen, my sweet, I'll ring Anthony Bryn-Morgan up and say you've changed your mind. You needn't take any job for a while, then I could advise you.'

Dinah moistened her lips. 'But I haven't changed my mind,' she pointed out. 'And I need to work. I'm not exactly in the position of a girl coming out here to get married right away. I've got to support myself for at least six months while we make up our minds. I won't live on Aunt Kate, and besides, I should be bored to tears. I promised the Bryn-Morgans I would see their son. He rang me yesterday and sounded most kindly. I've no reason to suspect he will ever be other than that to me. I don't believe in personal dealings with one's employer, so rake or not, it won't matter. I'm keeping that appointment and taking that job.'

'I can only hope, in your best interests,' said Mrs. Milgrove pathetically, 'that you don't get this position. I feel so responsible for you.'

Dinah immediately felt a churl, and apologized. 'I'm sorry, I'm sure you do. But I feel it's best for me to keep an open mind and to make my own judgments.'

They began, all of them, to talk of other things.

When Russell left he asked Dinah to walk round to the garage with him. She could quite understand that he did not want to kiss her good-bye in front of his mother.

They paused in front of the car, he looked at her, sighed lovingly and forgivingly. 'Dinah dear, you must make allowances for Mother. She was so upset about Aunt Effie.'

Dinah instantly felt a beast. 'Oh, I hadn't thought of that. They were very devoted, were they? It must be hard when someone from your childhood dies.'

'Oh, not from her childhood. Aunt Effie was Dad's sister.'

But Mother was so upset. Aunt Effie had always looked on me as her heir - we thought. I was named after her husband. She had no family. It doesn't worry me, of course. But there was just a small, token legacy. Mother was upset for my sake, and especially the way it was left.'

'How do you mean, Russell?'

'It was left to my sister. To Robin.'

Dinah drew a deep breath .. 'Well, hat's nearly as good, isn't it? It's still in the family.'

'Not really. Mother doesn't approve of Robin's husband. She feels he'll just waste the money.'

'Why, Russell? Is he a ne'er-do-well type?'

'Not exactly. But not a settled, secure sort of person. He's a writer. Mother thinks he ought to have a job. But he and Robin are travelling around the world on a shoestring. She's crazy about him. They find lodgings or a flat or stay in a motor camp - they're in Suva, Fiji, at the moment. Robin works while Brett gets on with his novel or articles. She's done some most menial tasks, housework, waiting on tables, it's not the thing, Mother thinks. Then as soon as they have enough for another plane or boat fare they're up and off.'

Dinah said slowly, warily, for she didn't want to sound too contrary, 'Isn't that the ideal life for a writer? I mean they have to have experience and backgrounds. Once he's got it hose maybe they'll settle down quite happily and raise a family. I think it's rather courageous.'

'Mother feels the money will be wasted. If it could have gone into a home, or some land, she'd feel better.'

'Perhaps it's a better investment as it is - stored up in the memories of places visited, people met, to be brought to life again in a permanent record in the pages of a book for lots of people to enjoy.'

Russell laughed, pinched her cheek, bent and kissed her.

'A real little idealist, aren't you? But I must go. Darling, I would have second thoughts about taking a job with Bryn-Morgan's if I were you.'

Dinah's eyes were honestly regretful. 'I'm sorry, Russell. I hate to go against you so soon after arrival, but I must keep my word, at least to the interview, though I would say I'm dead certain to get the job. Good-bye, Russell.'

She was glad there wasn't more than half an hour left before she must leave Mrs. Milgrove and go down to the city. She rang for a taxi.

Mrs. Milgrove took up the interval by showing her the rest of the house, the garden, then came into the bedroom with her, repeating the pulling up of the blinds.

Dinah ran a comb through her hair. Suddenly Mrs. Milgrove said in a warmer, more kindly tone, 'You know, I had a friend whose hair was every bit as bright as yours, but she managed to darken it by putting olive oil on it every single night.'

Dinah felt at a loss for words. She gazed at her coppery locks. She was used to compliments about her hair, had been told how lucky she was that it was natural, that so many girls dyed their hair just that shade. She managed a light laugh.

'I imagine Aunt Kate would take a dim view of that. Despite her artistic tendencies, she's a cracker-jack housekeeper, and I shudder to think what the pillow-cases would be like. I take it you aren't an admirer of Titian.'

Mrs. Milgrove was aware she had gone a little far, even if she had tried to disguise her disapproval with a kindly seeming tone. She said uneasily, 'Oh, I like red hair on women. Not on little boys. On them it's just plain ginger. It usually goes with freckles too, and chipped knees and mischievousness.'

Dinah saw with devastating clearness exactly what Mrs. Milgrove meant. She didn't fancy a ginger-headed grandson. Dinah wanted to giggle.

'That's what a friend of mine got. Ginger-headed twins, complete with the freckles and chipped knees and pugilistic natures. Real broths of boys. Yet both she and her husband are as black as the ace of spades.'

She drew on her gloves, picked up her bag. 'Well, it has all been most interesting. Thank you for a delicious lunch. Russell will be bringing you over to see my aunt soon. I must go, I mustn't be late for Mr. Bryn-Morgan.'

She felt a kindred feeling for Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan sweep over her as she went down in the taxi. She'd take that job no matter what he was like, just to show Mrs. Milgrove. If Mrs. Milgrove detested Anthony Bryn-Morgan, she was quite sure that she, Dinah, would just love him. In fact she was prepared to agree with everything Mr. Bryn-Morgan said.

CHAPTER TWO

SHE wanted to giggle as Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan rose from his chair as she was ushered in. He was broad rather than tall, but with a presence, an aggressively kindly presence and had keen blue eyes, deeply graven lines in his cheeks and ... it was pretty certain that though he would now probably be described as sandy, he had once been a ginger-headed, freckle-faced urchin. . .

She had a feeling this interview was going to go with a bang.

It did.

Five minutes later Dinah was again subduing a rising temper and saying as icily as she could, 'I beg your pardon. Would you mind saying that again? I can't possibly have heard aright.'

'I think you did. My father has misled me. I took it you were the plain, sensible type. He praised your efficiency and manner sky-high. He certainly knows I prefer older women, in fact that I insist on that. I can't understand him recommending you. He must be getting susceptible in his old age. I didn't think to ask your age on the phone, and your voice sounded so mature. I'm afraid you're much too young and ravishing to occupy a position in my office, Miss Pritchard.'

Tawny sparks appeared in the green eyes. 'It may surprise you, Mr. Bryn-Morgan, that I've never been called ravishing before. Maybe when I've got over the shock I'll find it's a compliment. It had never occurred to me, either, that one must be plain to have brains, to be an efficient secretary. If that idea is

prevalent in New Zealand, maybe I'd be better as a barmaid.'

'We don't have barmaids. Sorry about that. But it won't prevent you getting a job in your own line. It's merely that I prefer *my* secretaries to be plain Janes.'

Dinah decided there was nothing to be lost by not barring any holds. 'I see - in direct contrast to your private life, you mean!'

'I don't think I quite get what you mean, Miss Pritchard.'

She was past caring. 'Or don't want to. I mean your reputation.'

His nostrils dilated a little. 'My reputation?'

'Yes. I was warned at lunch not to apply for this job. By a woman whose judgment *I ought* to have respected. She implored me not to work for you. But I felt I couldn't break faith with your father. She said you were a rake and that she wouldn't like any young girl she knew to work for you. She was right, oh, how right!'

A drawl had crept into his voice, but under it she sensed that he was blazingly angry. His blue eyes were almost black.

'I don't think you've got it quite right, you know. I'm merely terrified of beautiful secretaries. They so often have designs. Marriage designs. And I'm not a marrying man.'

Dinah's lip curled, oh, how it curled. 'I would have been a secretary without designs on you. *My* tastes run to the conventional - tall, dark, handsome. *Not* ginger, short, Bulldog Drummondish. Ohhhhhhhhh!'

The exasperated sigh surged to the surface from all the bewilderment and frustration of meeting Russell's mother and knowing herself disapproved. Of finding that Mrs. Milgrove had been right about the beastly man. Of having to admit she had been wrong.

Dinah stood up. She said through her teeth, 'You want to thank your lucky stars, Mr. Bryn-Morgan, that I have such a good control of my hot Welsh temper! Otherwise I would throw something at you. Good afternoon!'

She whirled around and went out of the door into the typists' room and across it to the outer office door.

One or two heads were raised, she knew, to see what the boss's future secretary looked like. A young accountant gave her a most appreciative look, but Dinah had eyes for none.

She was acutely aware of her heightened colour, her flashing eyes, but she only wanted to get away from the scene of her humiliation.

She made for the stairs, ignoring the lift. She wasn't in the mood to even say thank you to the liftman or anyone else in the Bryn-Morgan stronghold. Never had she scaled downstairs so quickly. Out through the haberdashery and glove and hosiery departments she went, intent only on one thing, to put as big a distance between herself and Bryn-Morgan and Sons in as short a time as possible. As she came out on to the pavement in Princes Street, a woman got out of a taxi.

Dinah said to the driver, 'Have you a fare to pick up, or can you take me to Belleknowes?'

'I can take you. Hop in.'

Dinah sank down with never a backward glance, so did not see Anthony Bryn-Morgan arrive out of the door a split second after her.

The taxi crawled along Princes Street, stopping at every Barnes' Dance traffic light, turned west at the Exchange and up Rattray and McClaggan Streets. Dinah wished they lived further out so she could pull herself together before seeing her aunt. Aunt Kate would never believe that the son of the Bryn-Morgans had so treated her.

She would probably feel too that Dinah could have conducted her side of the interview in a vastly different manner - with icy indifference rather than hot resentment.

No, she'd have to present a very watered-down account of what had happened. Oh dear. Dinah leaned forward, said breathlessly, 'Would you mind dropping me at the-next corner? I think I'll just walk up through the bush.'

He looked puzzled . . . rush into a taxi as if your life depended on it, then take a dander through the bush. Oh well, that was the public!

Dinah paid him, got out, walked to where Canongate joinedSerpentine Avenue . A track led upwards through the dim green bush. She could cool her hot noticeable cheeks in there.

She entered the dimness, striding furiously at first, then slowing her pace as her indignation subsided and the steepness took toll of her breath.

This could be the centre of an ancient forest, yet it was ten minutes from the heart of the city. How wise the pioneers had been to preserve this broad belt of native bush for all time.

Suddenly a bellbird chimed above her head.

She came up into sunlight on the macadam ofMaori Road , that swept, unmerged by footpaths, through two sections of bush. She had only to cross the, road and climb up the next lot.

A voice behind her broke the leafy stillness, making her jump.

'Good place for cooling off, Miss Pritchard,' it said.

She swung round, blinked, drew in her breath. Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan!

'You! How on earth did you get here?'

'Same as you, by taxi.'

Suddenly Dinah's heart gave a sickening jolt. He must be angry to follow her like this. But after all, she hadn't thrown anything at him.

'Don't be alarmed,' said Mr. Bryn-Morgan suavely. 'I've only followed you to apologize.'

'I was not alarmed. Why should I have been?'

'Why indeed?' His mouth twitched.

They stood in the middle of the road and looked at each other.

'Where do we go from here?' he asked, laughter in his eyes. It maddened Dinah.

'I've no idea, and I'm not in the slightest interested.'

'Oh, dear!' he said, 'all icy disdain. I think I like you better in a temper. It seems more natural in ginger-tops. Now - whoops! Don't lose your temper again or we'll never get anywhere. I'm here to apologize.'

Dinah said warily, 'For what, exactly?'

'For setting you back so much ... for conducting an interview with much less than my usual aplomb ... for goading you into losing your temper.'

She breathed out heavily. 'All this insistence on my temper is doing nothing towards keeping it under control. I'm not in the least sorry for anything I said. I'm only sorry I didn't really throw something at you. It would have been the most satisfying moment of my life! I've never liked vain men.'

'What makes you think I'm vain? I was merely being cautious. If you had any idea of what I've put up with from secretaries, you'd have realized I wasn't being vain ... just plain scared.'

'Scared!' Dinah snorted. 'I can recognize vanity when I see it. I might have known - just from the look of you.'

'How? You told me I was absolutely the opposite of any girl's dream. How come you thought me vain?' His tone held nothing but academic interest, it was intensely irritating. She didn't answer.

'Ah! you really haven't a reason for calling me that. How could you? If I'm what you say - ginger, short, Bulldog Drummondish - how could I be vain? Wasn't Drummond supposed to be the ugliest cuss?'

She let fly. 'Well, I once read something I didn't believe *at the time* ... that men who wear moustaches are usually vain!'

He put back his head and roared .. At that moment a car came round the bend. Mr. Bryn-Morgan took her arm, assisted her to skip to the edge of the road and said, 'Let's argue as we go.'

The path began in a series of steep steps with a handrail.

Dinah found herself up two steps before she stopped, shook off his hand, said, 'This is fantastic! Will you please go away? It's ridiculous, it's - well, everything. You've apologized. I accept that. I'll just remember you as the oddest New Zealander I've met to date. Now you go back to the dty and I'll go back home. You can tell your father that on looking the job over I didn't fancy it.'

'Oh, but I'm offering it to you.' He paused, hand on rail. 'How about starting tomorrow morning?'

She could have stamped her foot. 'You must be crazy. I wouldn't dream of working for you.'

'Why not?'

'Why not?' Dinah felt exhausted and somehow powerless. You couldn't maintain a furious pitch for long, and it was only that which had sustained her till now. She must get rid of him.

'I'll tell you why - because I like orthodox employers, older, more gentlemanly, family men. Men I can trust, not cocky, vain, impertinent upstarts. The sort of man your father is. I took such a fancy to him, so did my aunt. I thought you might have been a younger edition - but merciful heavens, you couldn't be more different. I don't see even a glimmer of a likeness!'

The blue eyes under the sandy brows danced. 'I don't see how you could. I'm an adopted son.'

It took Dinah fair between the brows. She closed her eyes against the impact of it. Oh, this was where temper led you! What a dreadfully cruel thing to have said! If only she had known ... if only she hadn't let herself be so infuriated ... She opened her eyes, felt her colour rise and ebb and suddenly knew she could not speak. Humiliated, she felt the rush of tears to her eyes.

He stared. The tears spilled over. Dinah thrust her hand into her jacket pocket in search of a handkerchief, encountered none, snatched at her bag, but before she could get it open, that hatefully amused voice said, 'Here, take this.'

He pushed an immaculately folded handkerchief into her hand. Dinah grabbed it, mopped furiously. It must be reaction. She blew her nose, turning away.

He said gently, 'I've never had anyone shed tears before on account of my being a foundling.'

Dinah couldn't speak.

'But don't feel so badly, Miss Pritchard. I've never cared in the least. You saw the mother and father

who adopted me. Wasn't I lucky? We all were. They adopted three - two boys, one girl. Our own parents mightn't have been half so fine.' He grinned. 'Not all parents would choose a ginger-headed, freckle-faced brat - mine did.'

Dinah's voice was slightly muffled with the handkerchief.

'With - with chipped knees?'

He chuckled. 'That too, probably. But not at the adoption time. Or the freckles, really. I was only a month old. But I probably had the look. Dear me, where have we got to now? I'm telling you my life-story. Let's get back to brass tacks. When can you start? Would you rather wait till Monday?'

Dinah had a complete feeling of unreality. 'I - I - feel as if I'm at a Mad Hatter's tea-party or something. I'm at a loss what to say or do.'

'The only thing to do is to go on from here, as my secretary. When two people clash so gloriously within five minutes of meeting, don't you think they're fore-ordained to know more of each other?'

She looked at him warily. 'Mr. Bryn-Morgan, if I do take that position it will be on the understanding that we get on to a formal footing from the word go.'

He pulled his mouth down, mock contritely. 'Yes, of course. I've already told you I have no personal dealings with my secretary whatever.'

'Exactly. And if it will ease your mind at all, Mr. Bryn-Morgan, I might tell you that my affections are already engaged.'

He chuckled. 'How truly Victorian! But no ring?'

'No. We met in England. But we're both being sensible. We distrust sudden attractions. I've come out to see how I like New Zealand life, as we want to be sure. So it's not just a case of a temporary job for a

few weeks. I mean I don't want you to think I'd removed an engagement ring in order to get a permanent job. We've set ourselves six months to make up our minds, and even after that, we would have at least a year's engagement. Both his mother and my aunt wish that.'

He whistled. 'But how prudent! And how extremely unlike a redhead. *They're* usually romantic. It beats me. No love at first sight. No sunbursts. No trumpets on the wind. Doesn't it come like that any more when even a redhead can be so calculating? Just a careful weighing up and assessing. Oh well, it's your life, Miss Pritchard. Evidently your young man doesn't have good red blood in his veins at all - but after the way you ... er ... reacted earlier I'd have thought you were a girl with go in you!'

Dinah, cheeks flaming, looked away from those audacious eyes. She'd show him. She'd be such a punctilious secretary, so circumspect ... she'd wipe out that first impression. She shied away, mentally, from the knowledge that the whole thing had been a glorious moment of escape from all the inhibitions she had known these last months. She had told herself she was disciplining herself, that it was good for her to look before she leaped, that this attitude to marriage was sane, sensible, but ...

Dinah closed the door of her disloyal thoughts upon that nostalgic, unsettling 'but'.

They agreed that she would start the day after tomorrow.

He told her she would be expected to work Friday nights. Monday to Thursday hours were nine till five-thirty, Fridays nine till nine at night, Saturdays they did not open. Only milk-bars and fruiterers were open on Saturdays in New Zealand .

They came up on to Queen's Drive, the road running through the bush, and above them was the open space of the play park.

Dinah said hurriedly, 'There's no need to escort me further. We've discussed everything that needs discussing and plenty that didn't. I'd prefer to go on alone.'

'That track is too lonely. It's quite dense bush.'

'Good heavens! I'm not a little girl. And I'm quite fond of my own company.'

He grinned. 'I get it. You don't want to go rambling with a - what was the archaic term you used? Ah yes, a rake!'

'Mr. Bryn-Morgan! We were about to get back on to the footing of employer and employee.'

'Yes, of course. Sorry. But I'll see you through the bush.'

If ever a man was bent on getting his own way ... and succeeding, it was this man. She wished she'd never mentioned that wretched track.

They came up across Alison Crescent and turned the corner. Dinah stopped dead.

'Mr. Bryn-Morgan, my aunt's there - see, that woman sketching. I don't want to explain to her how it is that I'm coming up through the bush with my future employer. I like to keep my business and my private life as separate as you do. Will you please go now?'

'Yes, of course, my dear Miss Pritchard. Rakes are adept at deceiving duennas. I shall melt discreetly away. Good afternoon. See you at nine on Thursday. By the way, I'm a demon for punctuality.'

Dinah said good-bye through stiff lips and moved on towards Aunt Kate's sublimely unaware figure.

The intervening time did much to assist Dinah's turbulent feelings towards her new employer to die down. Except that she was going to show complete indifference to him as a man and to eclipse, if possible, his own impressions of her as a temperamental redhead, by being as coolly efficient a secretary as he could wish.

Thinking all this out had at least done something for her ... it almost completely submerged the deep uneasiness she had known at Mrs. Milgrove's probable antagonism towards her prospective daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Milgrove came across with her son on the Wednesday night to call on Aunt Kate, and there had been nothing to cavil at in her manner. In fact she was so affable that Dinah experienced a rise of heart. Perhaps Russell had worked the change. In which case there was hope for a more harmonious future.

She thought the house charming and one could see she was impressed with Aunt Kate. Well she might be. Aunt Kate had had a hair-set, had dressed in pastel colours, had seen to it that the house was immaculate, shutting doors where remnants of packing cases and straw were still evident.

Aunt Kate was even gracious when Mrs. Milgrove said, 'I believe you paint a little. Flower studies, too. I must do you a flower study some time. Perhaps an arrangement of gladioli. I take prizes for my gladioli.'

Not even by the flicker of an eyelid towards Dinah did Aunt Kate betray her scorn of prize blooms, her penchant for painting the little wild flowers of copse and meadow. When they had gone Dinah said, 'Thank you, Aunt Kate. That augured well for future family relations, I think. You were splendid.'

Aunt Kate picked up a tiny savoury from a plate, stuffed it into her mouth, said, 'Yes, wasn't it wonderful? I was quite proud of myself. Dinah, did you ever read *The Rim of the Prairie* by Bess Streeter Aldrich?'

Dinah didn't even blink. She was well used to her aunt's rapid and irrelevant changes of conversation.

'Yes - that one about the heroine who was adopted wasn't it?'

'Yes. I wonder if you remember that bit where Nancy and the banker's daughter, who detested each other had a very cordial session?'

'M'mm. Vaguely. Why?'

'Don't. you remember Nancy saying, "Lovely gracious things dripped from our lips" and adding mournfully "and froze in long, icy stalactites!"?'

Dinah stared, tried not to laugh, then her lip quivered, she lay back and gave way to her mirth. So did Aunt Kate.

They sat up, mopped at their eyes, looked remorseful and told each other they had horrible natures.

"And probably," said Aunt Kate without conviction, 'she will improve upon acquaintance.' She added, 'Isn't it odd? Some people you feel you know from the moment you look at them. Like that Mrs. Bryn-Morgan, for instance.'

Next morning, as Dinah put in an appearance at the breakfast table Aunt Kate said, 'Good heavens, child, what on earth have you put on that dingy-looking rig for? I've never liked it. It subdues all your glorious colouring. What a thing to wear to work on your first day!'

Dinah smoothed down the pencil-slim charcoal pinafore frock with the charcoal-and-white checked blouse that went under it and said, 'It suits my mood. I want to look subdued. Employers don't look for something bright to splash on canvas, dearest of aunts, they want efficiency, someone always there but not obtrusive, ready to melt into the background against the greater importance of business executives and warehouse representatives.'

'My stars, what a speech! I've never heard you voice views like that before. What's come over you?' Her voice was bewildered, her eyes inquisitive.

'Oh, I was just remembering that first job of mine,' said Dinah quickly, scooping up a spoonful of oatmeal. 'You remember that son of the boss's who was so upcoming.'

Aunt Kate's eyes narrowed. 'Any reason for you to think Mr. Bryn-Morgan's son is like that? If he's anything like his father he won't be.'

'He's not like his father. He couldn't be. He's an adopted son.'

'Who told you? His father? His mother? Why haven't you mentioned it before?'

'Oh, he told me. The son, I mean.'

'Did he? Goodness, you and he must have got on to very friendly terms right away. How-'

'Oh, I made *afaux pas* , Aunt - said he wasn't in the least like his father.'

'Did he mind?'

Did he mind?Dinah's mind flew back to the scene of the day in the bush and Anthony Bryn-Morgan's disconcerting laughter.

'No, he didn't mind a bit, Aunt Kate.'

'Very sensible. Why should he? Parents who adopt children are genuinely fond of them. With many parents - not all - parenthood is largely a matter of accident, and not always welcome, either. That makes me mad.'

Dinah giggled. 'I was thinking of how Russell's mother would look if you said that to her. She would think it was coarse, I'm sure.'

'Well, I think I'm going to like young Bryn-Morgan.'

Dinah, alarmed, said instantly, 'Aunt Kate, I don't want you inviting him up here just because we met and liked his parents inCanada . I want to keep my business life and social life apart.'

Her aunt stared. 'Why, Dinah? I promised Mr. and Mrs. Bryn-Morgan we'd go to see them when they arrive back.'

'Well, time enough then. If we really must.'

'Didn't you particularly like this son of theirs?'

'No, not really. He's definitely not my type. But it's a job.'

Aunt Kate said no more. She had a positive genius for leaving well alone.

CHAPTER THREE

THAT first day was, as all first days are, a medley of impressions, a sense of nervous strain and a wonder at the back of Dinah's mind if she had done the right thing.

She had never worked in so large an establishment before.

Both her previous positions had been with law firms, small, select, where office routine was confined within certain limits.

Here, one was most conscious of being part of a shop, with a huge staff. That the business of buying and selling came first, that there was much more of the human element in this.

The buying-room was off her office, which lay between that and Mr. Anthony's own office, and the typists' room led off it too, so that she seemed to work in the hub of industry.

She was also rather ... well, disgruntled ... to find Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan's attitude to his staff so kindly, yet so correct. In fact, she couldn't fault it. She dared not analyse this. It might have revealed a flaw, hitherto unsuspected, in her own nature, to have been forced to the conclusion that she was really

looking for him to be the ladykiller type with the shopgirls, just to bolster up her own resentment of him.

He introduced her to all the office staff first, in the suite of offices on the first floor. It was a large office staff, with the head typist a Maori girl with exquisite features and a carriage of her head that made you wonder if she had royal blood in her.

Mr. Bryn-Morgan said, 'I think it's very necessary and desirable for you to get an idea of the whole layout, so we'll go right through the shop, reserves and workrooms, tearooms, hairdressing and. all. You won't remember all the names, but I'll supply you with a list of the heads of departments for future use. However, I feel it makes it easier all round if you're properly introduced. We have a fairly good and loyal staff, taking it all round. A few problems, of course, a few who don't pull their weight. But in the main, they're a good crowd. Come along.'

No, she couldn't fault his manner to the staff, and liked the way he included even the most junior members of departments in his introductions.

He stopped by the most glamorous creature at the beauty counter. She was in an oyster-coloured uniform, with a touch of leopard-skin trimming at boat-shaped neck and wrists. She had ash-blonde hair, smoothly swept into a perfectly lacquered hairstyle, the darkest of eyes and startlingly black brows, mysteriously shaded and bewitching.

The cosmetic bar was called 'Cleopatra's Corner' and Mr. Bryn-Morgan said, 'Oh, Cleo, you'd be interested to meet Miss Pritchard, she's from Wales, too.'

Dinah felt vaguely surprised.

'This is Miss Davies, in charge of this counter and, as you'll note, admirably endowed by nature for this sort of career.'

Cleo Davies laughed. 'I'd say, looking at Miss Pritchard it's a wonder she didn't go in for it herself, but maybe she's got brains as well as beauty.'

This was so much an echo of the disastrous conversation on Tuesday that Dinah said very hastily,

'Where did you come from in Wales ? Have you been out long?'

It seemed Cleo Davies had been just a schoolgirl, which explained why she had lost most of her accent but a charming trace.

By Friday night Dinah was fairly sure she had gained Mr. Anthony's respect for efficiency. Certainly things had gone smoothly. It wasn't the busiest of times in the drapery trade, though business was brisk enough, and seemingly, the Maori girl, Airini Kahika, had kept things well up to date when she was acting-secretary. Dinah wondered why she hadn't automatically moved into the higher position.

She found she rather liked working on the Friday night; She had a dinner in the excellent tea-rooms, finding she was entitled to a concession, and enjoyed shopping in the big store in the rest of the hour. She had an armful of purchases when she came to Cleopatra's Corner.

She picked up some skin perfume. Cleo smiled at her. 'Honey, I'd better tell you. Shopping by staff is taboo in lunch and tea-hours, or during busy times. It's supposed to be just between nine-thirty and eleven-thirty. It's a good thing. It leaves one's meal hours free to shop elsewhere. But it's something Mr. Anthony is really strict with. So is his papa - or was. Bryn-Morgan senior is retired now. You see, only half the staff are on in these hours to cope with customers.'

Dinah replaced the skin perfume hurriedly. 'Oh, thanks for telling me, Cleo, I'm rather keen not to offend.'

Cleo grinned. 'Oh, he's not an ogre, only a disciplinarian, which is natural with a staff the size of this. Only thing to be. Though in any case, I daresay secretaries might be able to get away with things we mere shopgirls couldn't. I mean he might need you at his elbow every hour and prefer you to shop in your own time, but meantime, I'd play safe if I were you. Find out.'

Dinah felt she was going to like Cleo Davies.

She got back to the office at the same time as Mr. Anthony. His eye lit on her parcels. Dinah felt her colour rise guiltily. They were all wrapped in the distinctive lavender paper of Bryn-Morgan's.

'Oh, there was one thing I forgot to tell you, Miss Pritchard, you're supposed to-'

'Yes, I know, Mr. Bryn-Morgan. I found out just five minutes ago. Miss Davies told me. I won't offend again.'

He stared. 'Offend! What can you mean?'

She made a gesture that was almost a shrug. 'Shopping in the tea-hour. Taking up time that should belong to the customers. You had forgotten, but I know now.'

He laughed. 'I thought you'd got me wrong. If you'd let me finish I'd have said I meant to tell you you're entitled to ten per cent staff discount. Or did they recognize you and give it to you? But Friday tea-hours we have a lot of staff on temporarily - students and so on - and they may not have known you. Let me have your dockets and I'll assess the amount and see you get a credit note for it. Looks as if you've been patronizing us very well.'

Dinah found herself opening the parcels, fishing out the dockets. She picked up the scattered goods, crushed them into her shopping bag, spread one piece of paper over the top of them. Mr. Anthony calmly lifted them out again, deftly folded the goods, rewrapped them with incredible swiftness that meant only one thing - he must have learned his trade behind the counter - snapped off some Sellotape from the dispenser on her desk and returned the parcels to her bag.

'Thank you, Mr. Anthony,' said Dinah meekly, and sat down at her desk.

'You'll have a peaceful night without me,' said her employer. 'And if you could get through all those reports I'd be most grateful. I've got a V.I.P. coming in on Monday. Minister of the Crown. So It would be good to have things well ahead.'

As she watched him leave the office Dinah reflected that while she would have a peaceful night in the office, no doubt the shop staff wished him back above stairs on Friday nights. He'd keep them on their toes all right.

Russell was waiting at the staff door when she left at ten past nine, coming out with half a dozen others,

including Mr. Anthony.

Dinah's heart gave its customary leap when she saw him.

He had such a clean-cut, debonair look. She was proud to have him meet her, though no doubt some of the girls would think she was a fast worker, having picked up an escort so soon after arrival in New Zealand.

Mr. Anthony turned to Dinah. 'Goodnight, Miss Pritchard.'

He came up short against Russell, stopped. 'Oh, hullo, Russell, how are you? Haven't seen you since you got back from overseas. Have an interesting time? Good. I say, you weren't wanting anything, were you? And arrived too late for it? I'll open up if you do.'

'No, thank you,' said Russell distinctly and, Dinah thought, distantly. 'I came to meet Miss Pritchard.'

The two men eyed each other in a way Miss Pritchard found distinctly odd. It was almost challenging. How imaginative. How could it be? But why hadn't Russell said he knew her boss personally, on Christian name terms, in fact? His disapproval might have carried more weight had she known.

Mr. Anthony seemed to recover first. 'Oh, isn't that interesting. I'd no idea you knew my secretary. Met her overseas, did you?' He turned to Dinah and his voice was suave. 'I hadn't realized that this was what had brought you to New Zealand.'

Russell said stiffly, 'I think Miss Pritchard's aunt had always wanted to see the Dominion.'

Dinah felt he was disclaiming her.

'Oh, I see.' There was an undercurrent of laughter in Mr. Anthony's voice. 'How ridiculous of me. And here was I suspecting a romance. That relieves my mind no end. I don't want to lose my secretary for a very, very long time. She's most efficient, I assure you.'

He nodded briefly to Dinah and Russell and walked away.

Dinah allowed herself to be put into Russell's car, and because traffic was heavy at the Exchange corner, she didn't say anything till they were going around Queen's Drive. 'Darling, I didn't know you actually knew my boss.'

'I know him only too well. We went right through primary and High School together.'

'I - I wondered why you didn't say at the time how well you knew him.'

Russell drew up at their gate. 'Well, Dinah, to be quite candid, you were in a very unpredictable, contrary sort of mood, so I deemed it better to say as little as possible.' Dinah was shocked into silence.

'Well?' said Russell.

She said slowly, 'I don't quite know how to reply to that. I don't think I'd better even try. I've got a red-headed temperament allied to a Welsh one. It makes for extra fieriness, perhaps. I - I didn't particularly appreciate your mother saying straight out that I must not work for Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan. Both my aunt and my father believed in letting me make my own decisions, even my own mistakes.'

Russell, sighed, a forbearing, aggravating sort of sigh. 'That could be another way of taking the easy way out, when trying to cope with anyone self-willed. Even to spoiling her.'

Dinah's hands clenched in her lap. She couldn't believe that Russell had said just that. She mustn't lose her temper, this wasn't the moment. She must try to get back on to the footing they had known those sweet hovering brink weeks in Wales. What happened in between? She felt bewildered, bereft.

'Russell,' her voice was imploring, 'what's happening? We... we were so happy in Cardiff. We just seemed to click. What's happened? I'd built so much on meeting you again. And nothing's been quite as I

imagined it. It's been dust and ashes.'

'Oh, come, Dinah. That's being unnecessarily dramatic. This is the settling-down process, the interim your aunt and my mother thought would be so wise.'

'Th - that certainly rubs the stardust off, doesn't it?' said Dinah, her voice wobbling.

Fortunately Russell responded to that in the right way.

He turned and caught her in his arms. 'It's all right, dear. Let's forget it. You could easily be homesick, strange, not yourself. We'll settle down. You'll get used to being guided by me. We'll go to the theatre tomorrow night. I've got seats for the opera.'

'A Gilbert and Sullivan?' asked Dinah hopefully. 'No, no. Grand opera.*Il Trovatore*.'

Dinah didn't dare say she didn't care for grand opera and that of them all, she most disliked *Il Trovatore*. That horrible one about the baby being cast into the flames. Ugh! But she had better say nothing.

'You'll come in for coffee, Russell?'

'Yes, but I won't stay long, dear. This has been a very big week for Mother and a trying one. I don't want to be late. She never goes to bed herself till I'm in, you know.'

Dinah said nothing. She got out of the car, glad to breathe the salt-laden air that came up over the bush, from the harbour below.

Aunt Kate seemed to sense she'd have to keep the conversation from languishing, but it was hard going, and neither of them was sorry when Russell finished his coffee and stood up.

Dinah went to the door with him, and out on to the rose trellised loggia.

'I mustn't prolong this good night session,' said Russell. 'It's rather late.'

Dinah felt exactly as if he had slapped her face. 'I'm not expecting you to stand out here murmuring sweet nothings for half an hour or so,' she said tartly.

He kissed her cheek - because Dinah had sharply turned her head - and ran down the steps to his car. Dinah stood there, holding on to a pillar festooned with wistaria beginning to show bud, watched the lights of his car go round into Alison Crescent, turn uphill; she stood there a long time.

Across the harbour, lights went purring round the water's edge on the Portobello Road. One of them perhaps would be Anthony Bryn-Morgan's. He lived some distance out, she had heard. Above Harbour Cone a large star was shining. It blurred suddenly. In fact all the stars blurred. They dipped and swung over the dark pool that was the still harbour water. Dinah put up an impatient hand to brush the tears away. She mustn't let Aunt Kate suspect she had been crying. Or that Russell had gone quite so quickly. She'd wait here till the tears dried.

Dinah blinked at her employer's appearance on Monday morning. He had a very choice black eye. She gazed at it fascinated, then hurriedly transferred her gaze to the window.

He chuckled. 'Aren't you polite! Most secretaries would have said, "Good gracious, Mr. Anthony, where in the world did you get that black eye?"'

'No doubt,' said Dinah, seeking for words and as usual finding the wrong ones, 'your previous secretaries were more interested in what you do with your week-ends than I. I told you I liked to keep business and private life apart.'

'So you did,' he agreed solemnly. 'But being Welsh, I thought you might have been interested in how I came by this.'

She refused to let him see her interest was intrigued by this, and returned to her papers.

He let out his breath in a little whistling sound between his teeth. 'Ah, I have it. You're remembering that I'm supposed to be a rake. You think some enraged husband has seen to it that I've got my come-uppance!' He laughed in the most exasperating way.

Dinah drew in a deep breath. She was always doing it since meeting this man. And counting ten. 'Mr. Bryn-Morgan, if I'm to stay in this position, we must keep things more formal. I'm not used to this. I like things businesslike, normal, well ordered.'

'Yes,' he agreed, eyes dancing. 'I realized that from our very first interview.'

Dinah's cheeks grew warm. 'Mr. Bryn-Morgan-' she began with dignity.

He held up his hand. 'Now don't, I beg you, give in your notice. Thus far, if it's not a case of a new broom sweeping clean, you're a secretary par excellence. You are a pleasure to dictate to. We'd better declare a truce. Purely, of course, for the sake of the business. And not Mr. Bryn-Morgan, please. It's Mr. Anthony to all the staff.'

'I thought when your father had retired, you would automatically become Mr. Bryn-Morgan. Sorry.'

He chuckled. 'Dad won't be able to keep away when he gets back. He's going to take retirement hard. And though he'd never show it, I have a feeling that it would give him a real pang to hear me referred to by the staff as Mr. Bryn-Morgan. So that's settled.'

The door opened and in came the staff supervisor, Mr. Griffiths.

'Good morning, Mr. Anthony.' He burst out laughing. 'It really is a beauty, isn't it? But it was a grand game, didn't you think? Your team was on top all the way through.'

Mr. Anthony laughed. 'The team was -I wasn't. I was right under the whole lot. The scrum collapsed on me. Worst of being a forward. This was somebody's knee. And Aunt Hattie believes in the good old beefsteak cure. I had a most uncomfortable week-end.'

Rugby! He'd thought she'd be interested because she was Welsh.

Griffiths laughed. 'I think we'll have to lay that photographer off for this afternoon, though, don't you? Unless he takes the Minister full-face and your profile on your good side. One thing, the Minister won't think a thing about it, he used to be an All Black.' He went out.

'Have a nice week-end, Miss Pritchard?' Mr. Anthony asked. 'Manage to get into the country at all?'

'Yes, thank you, we went as far as Lawrence. I wanted to see a little bit of the Central Otago I'd heard to much about.'

'M'm. Pity you'd not been able to go further. The really good stuff is up by the lakes near the mountains. Sort of country that appeals to Scots and Welsh folk. When the Minister comes in this afternoon I want you to be handy. He'll want you to take notes of our discussion. Feel up to it?'

She nodded. At the back of her mind was the remembrance of the drive to Lawrence. After the opera she had said, 'Would it be possible for us to get right away by ourselves tomorrow? We don't seem to have got on the right footing yet. I think we owe it to ourselves.'

Russell had been quite keen. They had agreed to go to early service in the morning, have a lunch in town, then drive south-west.

Dinah had loved it. They had driven in silence part of the way, taking in the lovely countryside. Occasionally Russell explained bits about its early history, especially when they came to the gold-mining area. He took her up Gabriel's Gully, where a pick and shovel stood, marking the spot where Gabriel Read had first discovered gold in 1861 and thereby put Otago on the map of the world. Yes, it had been a lovely day.

But coming back through Waitahuna Dinah had suddenly said, 'Oh, Russell, stop, would you? There's an ewe in trouble.'

He instinctively slackened, but then picked up speed again.

'Well, we can't do anything.'

'But we can. *I* can. It's cast. It looks to me as if this one missed out on the pre-lamb shearing. It's very heavy in the wool. I can get it to its feet and it'll be right as a trivet.'

Russell said, 'Dinah dear, don't be silly. You can't go careering round people's paddocks getting sheep on to their feet. That's the farmer's job. I imagine they'll go round the sheep twice a day.'

'Yes, but sometimes they get held up. My father would never pass a cast sheep.'

Russell put his foot on the accelerator. There was no time to be lost trying to keep your temper, Dinah reasoned. Not time for tact, for sweet persuasion. She said, putting her hand on the door, 'Russell, stop! I insist!'

Scared she would open it, he pulled in, said, 'Now see here, Dinah, when I take a girl out for a pleasant Sunday afternoon ride I don't expect to-'

He was wasting his breath. Dinah was out of the car and running back. Russell heaved a sigh, began reversing back to her.

Dinah mounted the gate with an agility born of long practice, walked unhurriedly towards the ewe so as not to set all the others on the move, bent down, got a good grip of the ewe's hind legs, heaved her to her feet.

With a long knowledge of the crazy way ewes often haved, she kept a good grip, not allowing her to rush off madly only to collapse again, she got astride her, pulling her skirt up, and walked the ewe a few yards. Its lamb rose up from nearby, nuzzled its nose in, butted at the udders.

Dinah looked ruefully at her hands, wiped them on some long grass and came back to the gate. She felt a little apprehensive, but knew she just couldn't have left an animal like that. She met Russell's eyes rather appealingly. 'Have you a duster, please, Russell?'

He handed her the duster; she hoped, peeping up, for a twinkle.

'And you'd better get a stick and scrape that off your shoes,' he said heavily. 'And toss that duster into the ditch, it will smell to high heaven.'

No, that ride hadn't been an unqualified success.

The morning proved busier than Mr. Anthony had anticipated. At five to twelve Mr. Anthony said, 'Right, that's all, thank you, Miss Pritchard.'

She looked up. 'But you'll want these typed before I go to lunch?'

He glanced at the clock. 'Even you couldn't do them in five minutes.'

'I'm quite willing to work on and get them done.'

He shook his head. 'Trouble is I'll have to have you back sharp at one. The Minister is getting a plane north at four thirty. I have to have him at Momona at four-fifteen!'

'I didn't mean I'd just shift my dinner-hour. I needn't go home. I could phone my aunt, have some sandwiches, and a cup of tea sent in from the cafeteria.'

'Would you? It would set my mind at rest, I'll admit.' Dinah felt that for the first time they had got on to a proper employer-secretary basis.

'Of course. I've done it heaps of times for my former employer on court days.'

'Good. Ask for some sandwiches for me too. I'll get these details checked.'

Teamwork. It suited Dinah. She felt life in New Zealand had, after all, a chance of falling into a comfortable routine. Odd how the very regularity of accustomed work could be soothing, smoothing over the rough places of adjusting yourself emotionally to other things. Other things in this case being Russell and his mother. A sense of unreality swept over her. She had come fourteen thousand miles for what?

Well, at the time she had thought it was at love's sweet bidding, How romantic it had seemed, going right across the world. How she had pitied other girls whose romance took a humdrum course. But now she was here, what did it boil down to?

It looked as if it meant fitting into the ruts of the Milgrove existence, conforming, compromising! This had seemed a gay adventure, new places to see, new people to meet ... already she felt restricted, hedged about. She had looked for existence in a casual, happy-go-lucky country, and what had she got? A conventionality more cramping than any she had known in the Old World !

They finished the letters, ate their sandwiches as they worked. 'Will you tell me the procedure for this afternoon, please, Mr. Anthony? You want me on call, I believe.'

'Yes. If you take these into the outer office, you could summarize them for me. I think you'll be familiar with the type of thing necessary. If not, Miss Kahika could put you wise. She's familiar with all the secretarial work. Oh, and I should like you to bring in the afternoon tea yourself. You'll be in here before then, I imagine, taking down this stuff I mentioned, and I'll give you the word. The tea-room is putting on something special. He's got a busy night ahead in Christchurch - these politicians work like blazes, you know; and it looks to me as if he'll have to skip dinner. He's got appointments as soon as he gets there and a meeting to address tonight.

'That's why I want you to take down something of what we're discussing and get it typed. He'll be using it as notes, so treble-space it, will you, with bigger gaps between each point. Get it?'

Dinah got it. She hoped she would be able to do it to both Mr. Anthony's and the Minister's satisfaction.

'Airini would help you with it. Can she read your short hand? It would amuse her, I'm sure. She's in the opposite camp. Her uncle is a Member of Parliament, but Labour. This bloke is National, of course. Conservative to you.'

'Yes, I knew they were one and the same. I swotted up a bit on the ship coming from San Francisco. Mr. Anthony, something puzzles me. Airini would have made a wonderful secretary and *beenau fait* with the workings of the organization too. It's a wonder-'

She stopped. Perhaps she was overstepping her position.

He did not make her feel that, merely said quite easily, 'It wouldn't be wise for Airini. I got rather ... er ... scandalously involved with one secretary a year or two back. I wouldn't want any of that to touch Airini's name. There are some quite charming people who would raise their brows over it. I would have liked to have had Airini. She lives down at the Maori Kaik, her people's property joins mine. I've known her most of her life, but for her own good name she's better in the outer office.'

Dinah swallowed. 'I think that's quite a fine attitude, Mr. Anthony.'

It gave her food for thought, or would when she had time to ponder it. So he did have certain standards and was undoubtedly kind. Whereas Russell was integrity itself, but not ... Oh, well, comparisons were odious. Russell wasn't actively unkind, only ... Dinah began gathering up her papers to go into the outer office.

Mr. Anthony was, of course, downstairs to meet the Minister. The Mayor brought him, then went away.

They came through the office together, laughing. They heard the Cabinet Minister say: 'It really is the father and mother of a shiner, isn't it? But taken in a good cause. You won sixteen-nine, didn't you? Good show!'

The staff were all standing. The Minister nodded to them easily, Mr. Anthony took his arm, said, 'You'd be interested to meet Miss Kahika. She's Henare Kahika's niece. Her people are neighbours of mine at Tangaroa.'

The Minister chatted to Airini for a few moments, then they moved to the privacy of Anthony's office suite. Half an hour later the buzzer went for Dinah. She was introduced, explained as a very new New Zealander, and they got to work.

After a few moments of rapid-fire dictation there was a pause, and Dinah looked up, a faintly puzzled line between her brows. Mr. Anthony responded to it, chuckling.

'My secretary is looking completely bewildered. I should have explained this morning. This is nothing to do with drapery but with experimental farming. Part of my land is for research for the D.S.I.R.' He turned to the Minister. 'My secretary is so new she only knows me as a draper.'

'Instead of which,' finished the Minister for him, 'he's a farmer turned draper. But he still continues some very valuable experimental work for us on his property at Tangaroa. He works in conjunction with Invermay Research Station on the Taieri Plains.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Dinah hurriedly, aware she might be wasting precious time. 'It isn't for me to show surprise really, but it did seem out of the run of the mill for drapery.'

Mr. Anthony added, 'And if you're unfamiliar with any of these technical terms, I'll check with you later.'

A faint smile lifted the corners of Dinah's mouth for a moment, but was quickly subdued. Her ball-point flowed on in its hieroglyphics.

The Minister strode up and down as he dictated, but it didn't seem to worry Dinah at all. He probably felt as if he were on an election platform. Occasionally he paused for a word, snapped his fingers. Mr. Anthony put it in automatically. It seemed to be mainly what Mr. Anthony had been telling him, as he was frequently quoted.

Presently the Minister paused, fingering his chin, both chins.

'Just a moment. If I can recollect it there's a quotation here that would be very apt, would emphasize this point. Um ... er ... oh yes. As that eminent veterinarian, Sir Meredith Pritchard, said in his authoritative book on the subject ...'

Dinah continued taking down the quotation as the Minister ummed and aahed over it. She hesitated, coughed, said apologetically.

'I'm sorry, sir, but that isn't quite accurate, and I imagine that tonight, with all these experts listening, you want accuracy. Sir Meredith said: "When warm weather arrives and bacteria grow readily in the uncooked milk, promote clean lactic souring. This can be initiated most readily by the use of a little cheese starter. Once souring has been initiated save a little of the milk each day to start souring of the following day's milk. This has important significance to the skim-milk pig feeder since it can help him to keep disease in check.'"

Her colour had risen slightly. Both men stared.

'What?' said the Minister. 'Do you know I believe you're right. And it's quite a difference, and there'll be plenty in the audience who'd like to see me tripped up. But how in the world-'

Dinah grinned. 'I know that text by heart. I typed it five times for Sir Meredith. I did the whole book for him.' She bent her head, put in the amended text, said, 'Yes-?'

'Just a minute,' said Mr. Anthony. 'Let's get this straight. I find it most interesting.*Pritchard*? A relative?'

Her colour was certainly high now. 'Yes. My father. But I hadn't wanted to mention that. I'm ready to go on now, sir. I know time is precious.'

'Oh, but this is most interesting,' said the Minister, and paused in his thrashing up and down to sit on the edge of her desk. 'We'll insert a bit here in that speech. Nothing like a bit of human interest to perk things up. Take this down, please. "By an extraordinary and pleasing coincidence, dictating this to Mr. Bryn-Morgan's stenographer, I found she was the daughter of Sir Meredith Pritchard and had actually typed his book." Very, very interesting.'

He broke off to ask Dinah all sorts of questions. Most of them she was able to answer knowledgeably. She was aware that Mr. Anthony was pleased. It did something for her spirits after the way she felt she had moved in a disapproving atmosphere since meeting Russell's mother.

But she was terrified she was wasting valuable time and adroitly handled the Minister so that he came back to the job in hand.

They finished, Anthony rang for the tea, said, 'If you would explain what is necessary to Miss Kahika, she can do the typing. I'd like you to have tea with us, Miss Pritchard, then Mr. Silverson can continue his conversation with you.'

Dinah wouldn't have been human not to have felt flattered. Things were going beautifully. One did hope all would go on oiled wheels during an official visit like this, and Dinah felt that her behaviour when she had first met Mr. Anthony would be submerged beneath the felicity of this.

She picked up the tea-tray. Airini held open the first door for her and said, 'You can manage the next one, can't you?'

'Yes, thanks, it automatically hooks back, of course.' She walked across to the inner office, pulled open the swing door, heard the click of the catch, restored her hand to the tray, stepped in.

Both men were standing in the middle of the floor, conversing. Dinah heard no more than a faint noise behind her, and the next moment the swing door, disengaging its safety catch, caught her a sharp blow between the shoulder-blades and precipitated her, tray first, in direct line for the two men.

'Look out!' she yelled in a frenzy ... just too late. They looked up, saw her coming almost horizontally towards them, tried to step back, but Mr. Anthony trod heavily on the Minister's foot. Mr. Silverson went off balance, stepped back to recover himself, found the back of his knees against the wastepaper basket and crashed over it, hands clutching wildly at the air and, encountering Mr. Anthony's arm, took a firmhold, and both men went down together, Dinah, the tray and its contents spilling across them.. .

It was pandemonium. Then an appalled silence. Dinah sat up, yanked the tray away, saw the Minister's shirt soaked with tea, uttered a moan, and made a clutch at his collar.

'Oh, sir, oh, sir, have I scalded you?'

'Well, it's damned hot!' he said, struggling to sit up. But Dinah was tearing at his tie. 'We've got to get it off, else It will act like a red-hot poultice and blister you.'

Anthony sat up, assisted with the knot, the buttons of his shirt took out a handkerchief, began mopping.

The Minister got to his feet, holding his shirt and singlet away from his chest. 'I don't think it will blister, it's only a splash or two. My suit took most of it. And Miss Pitchard pulled my things away from my ski.

Anthony looked at Dinah, she at him, they both gazed at the Minister and the three of them went into peals of laughter.

At that relieved moment the outer door swung open and the entire office staff crowded to see, looking horrified. Then one by one they joined in. Dinah could think of only one thing ... thank goodness she'd scrambled off the Minister's legs before the door opened. . ,

Tears of mirth were rolling down Mr. Silverson's cheeks.

He sat down, held his sides. Anthony Bryn-Morgan was convulsed. Dinah was laughing only in spasms and ooohing and aaahing in between and uttering rueful apologies.

Anthony sobered up. 'Miss Kahika, will you please take a note to get hat wretched door replaced by an ordinary door at the earliest possible moment. I've always felt it was a menace. The times it's done just that and knocked papers out of my hand are legion. Miss Pritchard, are you hurt?'

'No, only in my pride. What a terrible thing! I've been inNew Zealand less than a fortnight and I've knocked a Cabinet Minister off his feet. I feel humiliated.'

This occasioned another laugh from Mr. Silverson. 'My dear young lady, you've provided me with an

excellent after-dinner story. I shall live to be grateful to you.'

'Yes, but I can't provide you with an unstained suit. Oh dear, whatever shall we do? We can't let you travel like that.'

Mr. Anthony said, 'Oh, surely the men's department can provide another - at least-' He stopped, looking as near embarrassment as Dinah had yet seen him.

The Minister chuckled. 'I can't wear'em off the hook ... I'm much too portly. It's a long time since I was fit enough for the footer field. Never mind - just a sponge.'

Anthony said, 'I've got it. Off with your coat, sir. Airini, take it straight into the dry-cleaner's next door, explain what's happened and get them to spot-clean and press it while you wait. We can provide you with a shirt and singlet, sir. What size shirt, about a seven?'

He put the phone down, said to another typist, 'Now, Miss Reynolds, go down and bring up another tray. Three cups as before, and the hot savouries and so on. I myself will hold that wretched door! Good lord, here's the photographer. I'd forgotten about him.'

The photographer looked startled, as well he might, to see a far from immaculate Minister of the Crown, plus Mr. Anthony with a black eye that was really a sizzler.

'Would someone like to tell me what's happened?' he asked.

Mr. Anthony grinned. 'Well, not what you thought at first,' he said. 'I could see it in your eye. This' - indicating his eye - 'I got in Saturday's match. That' - with a wave towards the Minister's *sdéshabille* - 'was the result of an unfortunate encounter between my secretary, the afternoon tea-tray, and a swing-door! And you're not taking it for a Picture of the Year competition! Miss Pritchard, ring for another cup, would you?'

Dinah was glad when the next hour was over, even though they had all taken it so well, and Anthony had run the Minister out to the airport. He wouldn't be back before the shop closed and she would have the office restored and be able to escape without facing her employer again.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE next night she and her aunt were spending with the Milgroves. Aunt Kate hadn't visited there yet.

Aunt Kate was on her best behaviour. Poor pet, Dinah could sense it was a strain. She even perjured her soul by admiring some picture Russell had painted as a schoolboy. She praised the flower creations that had been arranged in their honour, though there at least she could be sincere. Mrs. Milgrove did have a way with them that was undoubtedly artistic.

Taking it all round it was a very pleasant evening. Russell looked across at Dinah and smiled, quite a loving sort of look. Dinah smiled back, her heart in her eyes, glad for once of harmony.

'You had an interesting time yesterday, Dinah my dear,' said Mrs. Milgrove. 'You met the Minister of Agriculture, I hear.'

'Yes' said Dinah, subduing a twinkle. How interesting it had be Mrs. Milgrove would never know, she hoped. 'You noticed the photo in the paper?'

Russell picked up the morning paper and passed it over. 'Quite a nice one of you, dear, you look the perfect secretary.'

Dinah conquered a giggle that threatened to come to the surface and hoped Aunt Kate wouldn't be misguided enough to tell all. It had been too good not to share with her.

The photographer had taken it after the Minister had donned his new singlet, shirt, and tie. He had carefully arranged the two men so that Anthony's black eye could not be seen, and Dinah herself was merely a minor figure in the left-hand lower corner, seated with a pad in front of her.

It was on the front page and had done much to reconcile Mrs. Milgrove to the idea of Dinah working for Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan. She could now say to her friends, 'This is the girl Russell is ... er ... interested in. He met her in England. She transcribed a speech for the Minister to give in Christchurch.'

Mrs. Milgrove provided a delectable supper. All in keeping, of course. You couldn't imagine Russell's mother inviting a crowd of young folk in and letting them cook bacon and eggs and sitting on the kitchen table to eat them. Thoughts of the crowds of young folk Aunt Kate had entertained at home for herself and David came into her mind. But it was foolish to compare people. Dinah went on eating featherlight cream sponge with a cake-fork.

Suddenly she heard it again, outside the french windows.

She had not been quite sure last time. A hungry, pathetic mew it was. She put her cup and saucer on a low mahogany table, rose quickly, undid the window before Mrs. Milgrove could stop her and let it in, a half-grown ginger cat - at least most of it was ginger, and thinner than any animal ought to be.

It rushed straight in, made for Aunt Kate, and yowled piteously.

'Oh, the poor thing's starving,' she said, and put her cup down.

Dinah picked up the milk jug, filled her own saucer, put it on the floor, then realized Mrs. Milgrove had uttered a dismayed and outraged squeak.

Dinah looked up. 'Oh, sorry, perhaps I should have asked you for a kitchen saucer, but it was starving and I didn't think.'

Mrs. Milgrove said stiffly, 'I never feed stray cats. Once you feed them you never get rid of them.'

Dinah said, 'But I thought you loved cats.' She waved towards a large photo of a handsome Siamese cat. 'You told me all about your Timothy.'

'That's quite different. We're always getting strays in from the bush.' She regarded the kitten, still lapping madly though the saucer was nearly empty. 'That isn't the right sort of cat.'

Mrs. Milgrove meant it wasn't a Siamese or a Persian.

Dinah took her up wrongly.

She cast an expert eye on the kitten. 'Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, of course. She-cats do bring the toms around. But you could have her spayed. They make adorable pets then. In any case she may have been done.'

Dinah picked up the little cat, explored its fur with an experienced finger, feeling for scars. 'No, I'm afraid it hasn't. But you could get a vet to do it.'

Mrs. Milgrove found her voice. 'Dinah!' she said in awful accents. 'What sort of talk is this? - and ill front of Russell!'

Dinah dropped the kitten back by the saucer. 'Eh? But - but I only said-' She stopped, grinned. 'Oh, sorry, Mrs. Milgrove. My father was a vet. I used to help him. I'm so familiar with all those terms I don't think a thing about them. And besides, Russell isn't a strange man - he's the man I'm probably going to marry.'

'Nevertheless those topics are not suitable for general conversation. Thank goodness no one else was here. Russell, will you please carry that kitten outside. It may not be house-trained.'

Dinah was sure Aunt Kate murmured softly, 'How indelicate,' but dared not look in her direction. Dinah knew that discretion should have been the keynote now, but she couldn't help it, being Dinah. She rose, clutched the kitten.

'Oh, please. Look, it's skin and bone. Haven't you got a bit of meat or fish in the fridge?'

Russell rose with a tormented look, a man torn between his mother and the girl he loved.

'Dinah, come on out to the wash-house and we'll feed it out there. Mother's really very kind to animals at heart, but we've had an overdose of strays from the bush. We couldn't possibly keep them all.'

Poor Russell, he suffered the fate of all men who try to please two women. He satisfied neither.

Left alone with Aunt Kate Mrs. Milgrove sighed. 'I do try to make allowances, but that girl must have been left motherless very young and been hopelessly spoiled by her father and brother. She lets impulses ride her.'

Aunt Kate's chin came up. 'Mrs. Milgrove, they're very warm-hearted, lovable impulses. I'm afraid you don't understand. My brother's whole life centred around animals. So did Di's. She wanted to train as a vet too but my brother wasn't keen, he felt it was too heavy a life for a woman very often. So she tramed as a secretary instead - she was able to do all his book work - but it's born and bred in her to look after animals. Those terms mean nothing to Dinah, any more than to a doctor. And she would never let any animal starve.'

Mrs. Milgrove looked offended. 'Well, I daresay I belong to the old school. I like reticence.'

Aunt Kate said gently, 'In certain things so do I. I deplore this modern tendency in books to leave nothing to the imagination. I feel they lack true artistry in that. They tell all, so atrophy the imagination of their readers and strip love of all its poetry. '

Mrs. Milgrove blinked. Aunt Kate had lost her.

Aunt Kate continued: 'But there is a certain lovable frankness and honesty in Dinah I would not like to see her exchange for pious humbug.'

Mrs. Milgrove blinked again. Was Mrs. Livingstone insinuating that she was a pious humbug?

Aunt Kate swept on. 'And she's anything but spoiled.

She is a most unselfish girl. If you could have seen the hours of leisure that she gave up to assist my brother, you could never have thought that. I sincerely hope my niece doesn't have to move in an aura of criticism. No one shows to their best in such circumstances.'

Mrs. Milgrove felt trounced, and more than ever incensed because she had been put in the wrong. She said, fidgeting with the lace of the cloth on the traymobile, 'I'm thinking of Russell, of the position he will occupy some day.'

'You mean you think some day he'll be a Queen's Counsel?'

'It's my dearest dream. And his wife will have to do a lot of entertaining. Dinah will have to learn to be more discreet, to curb her impulses.'

Aunt Kate suddenly giggled. 'You've got a fair task ahead of you.'

She was surprised and sobered by the look on Mrs. Milgrove's face. It was suddenly and fleetingly venomous.

'Russell had a fancy once before. Jenny was a nurse, a flibberty-gibbet of a nurse. She brought the atmosphere of the wards right into my very house. She never stopped talking about hospital routine, patients and operations. Some of the details, really!'

Aunt Kate closed her eyes. 'How nauseating,' she murmured wickedly. Then she opened them. 'And you hope very much that this will be only another fancy-?'

Mrs. Milgrove opened her mouth, but Aunt Kate swept on, very composed. 'So do I. That's why I suggested the six months. How gratifying to find you and I are at one.'

Dinah, in the wash-house, was feeling decidedly ruffled.

'And you needn't cut up that meat with such a magnanimous air, Russell, as if you were trying to humour me. If you don't like animals you can say so here and now, because while I haven't got a thing about them like some people have, I just couldn't put a starving animal out to fend for itself! And you'd better make up your mind that I'm going to bring up my family to have pets and to love animals.'

Russell dropped some meat down for the kitten, laid the knife down, said, taking her by the elbows, 'Now listen, Dinah dear. You're not going to make out I don't care for animals. But I don't love all animals. And I don't like mongrels. And I don't like ginger cats. That's a real barn cat if ever there was one. Look at it, one tortoiseshell leg, one black one, a white bib and a stripey tail. A real bitza. Of course our children will have pets, but we'll be discriminating.'

'You mean only pedigreed animals - spaniels with a line going back to King Charles, corgis from the kennels that breed the Buckingham Palace ones-!' She uttered a sound of real scorn. 'What are you going to do if our son gets followed home from school by a mangy-looking bitspieces puppy? Break the child's heart? Break mine?' She glared at him, picked up the knife in response to another hungry yowl and began cutting into the piece of steak that had been meant for Russell's lunch tomorrow.

It was too much for Russell. He gave way to mirth. Dinah tried not to follow suit, but joined in half-heartedly. She knew it was absurd, quarrelling at this stage about their mythical son's schooldays, but she was serious enough inwardly.

'When it's got a full turn I'll put it outside' said Russell

'Will that satisfy you, my sweet?'

'No, it won't. You can find me a box and I'll take it home.

No, on second thoughts a box might terrify it. I'll take it on my knee.'

Russell gave in. He really did love Dinah and he'd better humour her. He was going to have to placate his mother later, too.

Actually he managed things quite well, strove for a lighter note, said, as they returned to the drawing-room, 'I'll take Dinah and Mrs. Livingstone home right away, Mother. My tender-hearted Dinah wants to take that sandy cat home, so I'll do it with no more ado. It'll be on her own head then, I mean her own carpet, if it isn't house-trained.'

Dinah felt a rush of gratitude towards Russell, for that had been neatly done, but Mrs. Milgrove looked as if she thought Russell was being influenced already by Dinah's disconcerting frankness.

The sandy kitten took a fancy to the Harcourt Street house at once, or else it was so drowsily replete it would have settled anywhere.

Aunt Kate brought out a basket, lined it with a piece of blanket, while Dinah filled a scratch-box for it.

Then she looked at her aunt and they both giggled. Then Dinah looked despairing. 'Aunt Kate, whatever am I going to do?'

If she expected sympathy, she didn't get it. 'Well, you didn't expect it to be a bed of roses, did you? There have to be adjustments on both sides, you can make up your mind to that. It's not easy for Mrs. Milgrove either, having someone like you pitchforked into the family. Plenty of mothers-in-law are prickly to begin with and end up in being devoted to their sons' wives. And most daughters-in-law are usually too young to be anything but rather stupidly crass and intolerant and tactless to begin with. But they grow mellow too.'

Dinah was too astounded to say anything. Aunt Kate was probably right. She usually was. Maybe she, Dinah, had a lot to learn. And she might even become quite fond of Mrs. Milgrove in time.

But as she brushed her hair in front of her mirror, she looked at her reflected eyes and said out of her subconscious, 'But oh, wouldn't it have been easier if I'd liked her from the start like Mrs. Bryn-Morgan!'

The next moment she was staring at her reflection with a sudden awareness of what she had said. Mrs. Bryn-Morgan. Mr. Anthony's mother! Now what in the world had put that into her head? Mr. Anthony wasn't husband material, he had said so himself. Not a marrying man. No, he was, according to himself and to public opinion and Mrs. Milgrove, a philanderer, a rake. It was the Russells of this world who made good husbands, dependable, career men, they knew where they were going. Not farmers one moment and drapers the next. More money in drapery, no doubt. Especially in an inherited business. Mr.

Anthony Bryn-Morgan would have an eye to the main chance.

She arrived at the staff door at the same time as Mr. Anthony the next morning. There were painters at work on the sign on the edge of the veranda. They both looked up. Mr. Anthony waved to the men.

'What are they doing?' asked Dinah as they took the stairs.

She saw his mouth tighten a little. 'Changing the "Sons" to "Son", he said rather curtly. Then, loosening up a little,

'My brother died two years ago. I thought it would be better to have it done while Dad was away. He said it must be done, but kept postponing it, and I thought if I had it done while he was away it wouldn't be quite so poignant. We were both in the business to start with, but Owen loved drapery. Dad saw my heart wasn't in it and helped me buy the property down the Peninsula. I came back into it after Owen died. Not that Dad asked me to. He's not built that way.'

Dinah swallowed. Sympathy would be out of place. 'Your - your father spoke very well of the way you manage the business.'

He smiled. 'I don't do it as well as Owen did. He had a natural flair for it, was always full of new ideas. But I've grown to like it and I kept Tangaroa on, with a manager. A great blessing it wasn't far out of town.'

CHAPTER FIVE

THINGS settled down. Dinah walked circumspectly at home and abroad, in other words, with Russell's mother and with her employer. Their first interview had been a disaster, best forgotten. The affair with the Cabinet Minister had been hilarious enough at the time, but she wanted no reputation for unorthodox adventures to follow her and she wanted to impress Anthony Bryn-Morgan now with her unobtrusive efficiency. The atmosphere became more formal.

Mr. Anthony must certainly keep his private and business life separate, because Dinah noted no signs of familiarity at all with the staff. .

She said so once to Mrs. Milgrove when they were alone.

Mrs. Milgrove said slowly, 'That wasn't always the case.

He ruined one girl who was his secretary. I believe she is married now. The child was adopted. I suppose he has learned his lesson. I daresay the father put his foot down. And Anthony wouldn't want to fall out with his adopted father, of course. Too much money at stake.'

For once Dinah found herself with nothing to say. What could one say? Knowing nothing about it, one must remain silent. You could befriend a starving kitten, even if by so doing you mortally offended your mother-in-law-to-be, but you could hardly fly to your boss's defence with no weapons at all to your hand.

What did she really know of him, anyway, except that he was kindly to a fault, pursued a very socialistic attitude towards his employees, liked the atmosphere of the shop to be harmonious but was withal a stern disciplinarian?

She said lamely, 'Of course I have to speak as I find. He is most courteous to me and never says a word out of place.'

Mrs. Milgrove changed the subject.

It was the next day that Dinah overheard a conversation between her employer and the staff welfare officer. She hadn't known anyone was with Mr. Anthony, and from her own office, if people spoke clearly you could hear every word. She had been out of the office and had just got back.

She heard him say, 'I'd like you to find out if that little Miss Fanshawe in the millinery is in any financial difficulties at all. If so, let me know and I'll give her a rise, but you understand, Mrs. Mallows, I don't

want her to know why. Doesn't pay a single man to increase a young girl's salary for no particular reason. You know what I mean. I've an idea they're very hard up. I think the mother is partly an invalid and the brother still at school. The father is dead. The mother is probably on a pension. But I've noticed Miss Fanshawe is fairly shabby. She's a good kid, probably turns over far more than just board to her mother. And I heard her say to Mrs. Jones, "May I have staff discount on that dress for my mother? I really am buying it for her." She's a good little worker and always on time, so she deserves it anyway, but we'll make it a substantial one, and ask her not to spread it aboard.'

Dinah realized he'd prefer not to be overheard on this so she went into the other office till Mrs. Mallows came out. She thought about the conversation quite a lot.

Russell was very busy just now, but now that she and Aunt ~ate had settled down, made new friends, and started gardening, she wasn't so dependent upon him for social life.

Aunt Kate had met Cleo's mother by now and had formed a strong liking for her, just as Dinah had for Cleo. Cleo was fun. She didn't mean half she said, was outrageously candid and hero-worshipped Mr. Anthony.

'I'd fall at his feet,' she mourned one night, 'if he ever so much as looked my way. But he never as much as takes any member of the staff to even the staff ball. Not policy, he says. Probably right too. I say, honey, what's happening to your Russell? Am I wrong, or hasn't he been round so much lately? Don't let him slip through your fingers, pet, they don't often come that handsome.'

Dinah laughed, though she dropped. her eyes. 'Oh, he's been frightfully busy. A lot of court work. He's been up and down to Christchurch too, on something or other. And he's a terrific lot of study to do at home.'

But she wondered that it had been quite so noticeable.

She hadn't realized that Mr. Anthony had noticed it too.

He looked up from his desk, the one he used in her office when they needed to work together.

'I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to work overtime at very short notice, Miss Pritchard. Tonight. The costing clerk is down with 'flu and her staff are all working late. I can manage the cost code if you can assist me with the compiling of the lists. Any show of it?'

Dinah looked dismayed. She hadn't seen Russell for five days. And they had planned to go to this exhibition together. Some of Aunt Kate's pictures were on show.

One thing, Mr. Anthony was always reasonable. So she said, 'I'm awfully sorry. I've a firm date with Mr. Milgrove tonight. Any chance of making it tomorrow night?'

The next moment she was blinking and saying with an edge to her tone, 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Anthony?'

Anthony Bryn-Morgan's blue eyes met hers levelly, though she thought that under his imperturbability there lurked a gleam of malice. 'I merely said that it would do him good if *you* stood *him* up for once.'

Dinah swallowed. 'I don't think "merely" is the word.' Anthony Morgan grinned. 'You would like to tell me it's none of my business.'

Her tawny eyebrows arched ominously. 'Well, is it?'

He chuckled. Dinah's hands at her sides slowly clenched.

'You're trying to remember, aren't you, Miss Pritchard, that I'm your employer and it's doing violence to your feelings. Still, I'm glad to see that you've still got feelings. I thought the Milgroves were crushing them out of you, between them. You've got no spirit left. Incidentally, this conversation is right off the record as far as business relationships are concerned. No holds barred. Pitch into me all you like: It's nice to see a spark back in your eye.'

Dinah was temporarily bereft of speech.

He continued, 'I do hate to see a girl like you taking what you've taken from Milgrove. He cancelled his dates with you twice last week, didn't he?'

The spark grew. Dinah said stiffly, 'Russell had an important business contact to make ... after all, that's exactly what you're doing, isn't it, Mr. Anthony? Asking me to cancel a pleasure to work overtime tonight?'

'Yes, but I might not have done it had I not thought you would be so used to business demands taking precedence over pleasure that you would think nothing of ringing Milgrove up and telling him you were working late. And I would be" glad of your assistance.'

Dinah said stiffly, 'I've always been willing to work late when necessary, Mr. Anthony. I'm not afraid of work and I quite like the extra money. But tonight I did want-' She broke off, added impatiently, 'Oh, it doesn't matter. Yes, I'll work late.'

She lifted her phone. As she put her hand on the instrument Mr. Anthony's hand restrained her.

'No real compulsion, you understand. If you must go out tonight with Milgrove, then go. But you really are employing the wrong technique - not playing hard enough to get.'

Colour, carnation bright, flamed into Dinah's cheeks again.

'I don't admire that technique,' she said shortly. 'Maybe one could catch a man with that line, but wouldn't it be impossible to maintain? What sort of basis for matrimony would that make? What an intolerable strain - keeping a man guessing all the time, So your advice, however experienced you may be in affairs of the heart, Mr. Anthony, will*not* be taken by me!'

Instantly the hot words were out she wished them unsaid.*However experienced you may be in affairs of the heart.*

She realized, with inner shame, that that was hitting below the belt.

But Mr. Anthony chuckled again. '*Touché!* You've come to life with a vengeance. It's not at all natural for any redhead to be the ice-maiden you've been the last few weeks.'

Dinah stopped being sorry for him. She shook his hand off, dialled a number, and was annoyed to find her hand shaking. She controlled her voice, however.

She had a short wait to get through to Russell, a time during which she regarded her employer with what she hoped was a steady uncaring gaze. He, in turn, regarded her with amusement.

'Russ? Dinah here. I'm awfully sorry, but I must work late tonight. No, no - I really must.' Despite the fact that the odious Mr. Anthony was listening, she added with a touch of malice disguised with sweetness, 'Oh, but you'll understand, Russ. I've always realized your business affairs must come first. I could scarcely refuse Mr. Anthony, could I? Especially when he's overheard us cancelling out arrangements more than once. We're so short-handed at the moment. I'm sorry, but you said Jim was taking Sheila, didn't you? Tag along with them, darling.'

As she put the receiver down Mr. Anthony said approvingly, 'Fine. You're learning. Didn't like it, did he?'

Dinah said, 'It would scarcely have been flattering to me if he had been pleased! Now, seeing I've rearranged my evening to suit you, let's leave it at that and get back to our usual business footing - which I much prefer.'

The phone rang. Dinah was instantly the perfect secretary. Office routine would push things back into their normal perspective, overlay the amazingly personal tone that had cropped up after weeks of formality.

She put her hand over the mouthpiece. 'It's the representative of Plimmerton and Kydd, Mr. Anthony. He wondered if you could spare him a moment.'

'Yes, tell them to send him in. Would you take this list to Johnson in the reserves and ask him to check it. I'd like it back tonight.'

Dinah departed. As she left Mr. Johnson she ran into Cleo. She stopped. 'I'm working late tonight, Cleo. Any chance that you are too? Then we could have tea together.'

'Yes, I am, pet. I want to make out the lists for some new American indents and I've so many consultations today can't possibly get through. Shall we go to Gregor's? Can't afford anything more posh, too near payday. But I thought you were going out with the dashing Russell tonight!'

Dinah's lashes flickered. 'I was - but Mr. Anthony persuaded me to assist in the costing department. Thought it would be a change from my usual duties.'

Cleo stared. 'And you actually turned Russell down for that? Well, well! Not so much stardust in your eyes now, hon?'

Dinah's colour rose. 'Well, it's hardly policy to refuse to accommodate one's boss, is it?'

Cleo whistled. 'But Mr. Anthony's anything but a slave driver, his are always requests for overtime, never demands. That's why most of us would lie down and let him walk over us.' She hesitated. 'Except you, of course. You don't like him much, do you?'

Dinah said quickly, 'It's hardly that, Cleo. Just that I proved early in business life that it's best to be completely impersonal with one's employer. I almost lost one job over the boss's son.'

Cleo saw more than Dinah intended her to. 'Oh, like that, was it, pet? But Mr. Anthony is no wolf, despite his reputation. Still, perhaps you know best, honey. It probably suits him to have someone feel as you do. After that other affair he steers clear of any entanglements with the staff. More than one of his secretaries had an eye to the main chance, but he made it plain he wasn't a marrying man. Well, I'll see you at closing time.' And she was gone with a flick of skirts and a drift of some perfume that was probably labelled 'This for Danger' or 'Enticement in a Phial' or something equally ridiculous. Dinah thought wistfully that no man would ever stand Cleo up.

She thought other things too. The staff made no bones about Mr. Anthony's reputation, yet they so admired him. It was odd. Probably it had been a case of that secretary deliberately setting out to trap him

into marriage, but it hadn't come off. But Dinah couldn't help wishing he'd been stronger, had seen through it, not succumbed. Not that it mattered to her, she decided suddenly, shying away from the intensity of her thoughts.

She effected later, during the overtime period, that there was one thing about Mr. Anthony - although he looked so much the man-about-town behind his desk, he could work with the best of them on the most prosaic jobs when occasion demanded. And, as always in after-hours working, he was quite informal with the staff, even the juniors, who palpably quivered with excitement when he as much smiled at them.

There were nine of them working late tonight in the costing office, and Mr. Anthony had put a huge box of chocolates on the centre table and invited them to dip in as they pleased. Since there was a strict rule at Bryn-Morgans, as in all retail firms, that there was to be no eating in business hours this was much appreciated.

It was lovely to be relaxed, not constantly interrupted by the telephone, the stream of business appointments, travellers, advertising men, the coming-and-going of the stream of custom that one was always aware of, even in the offices.

Now and then Dinah had a pang at the thought of Russell at that art exhibition without her. Those were the places where Russell was at his best. How nice it would be, she thought wistfully, if for once Russell was waiting at home for her, with a fire on, supper ready, planning to sit in the firelight with her afterwards, uncaring about time.

But even if the unexpected happened and he was there, there would still be the thought of Mrs. Milgrove sitting up waiting for him - not patiently, but with a martyred air.

Dinah shook herself for these disloyal thoughts. She longed too much for the ideal. She must take the rough with the smooth. She must wait till that delightful time when she and Russell had a home of their very own, and there was no need for good nights. Yet she wished Russell had had his father still living. Then all Mrs. Milgrove's affections wouldn't be centred on her son. Robin had cut loose. Good luck to Robin. Dinah was glad she had got the aunt's money.

Poor Mrs. Milgrove, she was wholly and suffocating maternal. Not as one should be. Wife, mistress, mother ... who had written that? She couldn't remember ...

She was glad when the hands of the clock pointed to a quarter to nine. Only fifteen minutes go then a bus home a solitary cup of tea, and to bed. Aunt Kate had said the affair would be late.

She did not intend to lie awake wondering wondering ... knowing doubts of Russell rising in her mind, doubts, wakened by that beastly Anthony Morgan!

Her sense of fairness, never long dormant, asserted itself.

Had he really roused them? Her mind sprang to defend the questioning of her heart. She must be sensible Russell's career was important. It must come first, a woman must stand behind her man, not be a drag on him, never demanding.

Yes ... but has he ever shown real regret? On your behalf? Has he ever said: 'Blast, Turnbull would come to town and want to see me, when I'd set my heart on taking you out.' No. It was always: 'I know you'll understand dear this man is important to me.'

Dinah picked up another invoice.

Anthony Bryn-Morgan said, 'Don't bother with that one. I'm calling it a day.'

Aloud he said, addressing the others, 'We're going now. '

Sandy, would you lock up and see to the switches at nine and the automatic clock? I'm running Miss Pritchard home and I've twenty miles to go after that.'

Though Anthony Bryn-Morgan did not seem to notice it, this announcement was received with a definite air of surprise on the part of the staff. They stared at Dinah, who looked quickly down at her papers and by sheer force of will subdued a rising tide of colour.

He turned away. 'Get your coat and bonnet, Miss Pritchard, and we'll be off.'

He disappeared, presumably in quest of his own outer wear.

Cleo was frankly goggle-eyed. 'Really, my pet,' she said to Dinah, 'aren't you a dark horse? No wonder you put Russell off so blithely!'

Dinah swallowed, sought for something nonchalant to say, didn't find it, said, 'Good night, all,' and fled.

She walked quickly, breathing fast, along to their own offices. Her coat, hat and scarf were hanging there. As she picked them up, flung them over her arm and walked quickly to the door, the door from the inner office was flung open and Mr. Anthony appeared, his voice arresting her. 'Not so fast, Miss Pritchard, it's scarcely mannerly.'

She looked over her shoulder at him, her chin slightly elevated.

'Mr. Anthony, I don't profess to understand what you're up to - I think you've taken leave of your senses. You've always preferred to remain strictly on a business footing with your employees, at least since-' She stopped, feeling she'd better not go too far.

He finished it for her. 'Don't bother to spare my feelings, Miss Pritchard. After all, I don't deserve it. I haven't spared yours, have I, about Russell Milgrove? You were going to say: "at least since that other affair".'

Suddenly Dinah did not care. 'How right you are! But I prefer a business footing too.'

'Why?'

'Once bitten, twice shy. I was once forced into giving in my notice because my employer's son began to ... to-'

'Because your employer's son was forcing his unwelcome attentions upon you. Is that what you want to say? Prim and proper. In keeping with this dull-as-ditchwater secretarial attitude you've adopted since you came here. It doesn't deceive me one bit. It simply isn't you.'

'I wasn't going to say that at all. But one is supposed not to kiss and tell. That's why I stopped short. My employer caught his son kissing me - or trying to - and seemed to imagine I might be trying to trap his son into marriage.'

Dinah, in a royal rage now, uttered a sound of pure scorn. 'And the son was just an immature boy. I don't think he'd read a book in his life, he was as uninteresting as - as milk-and-water. So I gave in my notice before I was sacked.'

'You don't like 'em callow - or too young?' asked Mr. Anthony, in a detached tone. 'You like them a little older - a little more seasoned?'

Dinah's eyes flashed. 'I'm not the type to prefer too much experience, thank you.'

His laugh held real merriment 'Much, much better! Fire under the ice. Most attractive. Do you good to get mad like this. You've been inhibiting yourself too much. No wonder, trying to conform to the Milgroves' standards!'

'You're quite, quite insufferable, Mr. Anthony! You-'

'Yes, I know,' he admitted mournfully, 'but awfully good fun, don't you think, slanging each other like this?'

Dinah had been going to sweep out of the office, slamming the door in his face, but suddenly her sense of humour betrayed her. A dimple quivered, was suppressed, quivered again. She burst out laughing.

'That's better. Now, don't try to gather the remnants of your dignity around you and begin high-hating me all over again. Let's get going, or we'll have the rest of the staff meeting up with us at the door and wondering just what we've been doing in the office all this time.'

In a daze Dinah let Anthony help her into her coat, adjust her scarf. She stuffed her matching tweed hat into her bag.

His car was outside, his sleek, opulent-looking car. She was helped into it, still dream-like. As Mr. Anthony got into the driver's seat, she saw him look across to the far corner of the street and a smile touch his lips. She wondered what his thoughts were to occasion a smile like that.

She was not to know that he had just seen Russell Milgrove, tall, dark, debonair, come round the corner of Moray Place in his car, and endeavour to turn to pull into the kerb by the staff door.

The windows of Bryn-Morgan's were ablaze with lights, so Anthony was well aware that Milgrove couldn't have helped recognizing Dinah, but his car glided swiftly away, took the change of lights into Moray Place and made towards First Church on Bell Hill before Russell had time to do any more than leap out of his car and stare after the other. He wouldn't know where they were going, turning away from Belleknowes like this.

The staff door opened and out trooped the rest of the staff.

Russell recognized Cleo. He came across to her, looking as dazed as Dinah had a few moments before. There was only one acceptable explanation; He greeted Miss Davies. He had met her, once, at Dinah's.

'Cleo, is Dinah not well? I saw Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan carefully putting her into his car. By the time I edged to the pavement he'd let in the clutch.'

Cleo's voice held amusement and meaning. 'Oh no, she's not ill, in fact I'd say she's on top of the world.' Russell looked at her sharply. 'What do you mean?'

The sherry-coloured eyes looked mischievous, feline. 'Wouldn't any girl on the staff feel honoured at being escorted by the so-eligible heir to the Bryn-Morgan millions? Well, perhaps thousands. But lots of thousands! Especially if her regular guy isn't exactly making the pace hot! And with Mr. Anthony such a stickler for not taking staff out, she must feel very flattered. But rules like that are only meant to be kept till an irresistible temptation comes along, and those two seemed very pleased with each other tonight!'

Russell thought that was only too true, he hadn't missed the smirk on that fellow's face. 'But Dinah is engaged to me. She-'

Cleo's eyes had opened widely, innocently. 'Is she? I thought it was only a bee-yew-ti-ful friendship. Ripening perhaps, but nothing ... er ... pinned down.' Russell said shortly, 'We have an understanding.'

Cleo laughed provocatively. 'Well, how too, too sweet!

An understanding. All privileges, no ties. I thought understandings went out with feather boas and bustles. Girls these days, Russ, like things cut and dried. They like security. They like to feel sure of a man. So I've no doubt darling Dinah feels that since she isn't wearing a ring she's every right to a change occasionally.'

She sighed. 'What a pity you left the exhibition so early, you might as well have stayed on. I think they've arranged to have supper at Dinah's home. You'd better not gatecrash.'

It was sheer fabrication, born of a desire to tease.

Russell said hastily, 'Oh, I should hardly think so _ Dinah's aunt was at the affair tonight. Two of her pictures were hung. Dinah wouldn't take her employer there tonight when-'

Cleo said nothing, but laughed maddeningly. It made Russell feel like an early Victorian.

'I would like to point out, Cleo, that possibly I know Dinah better than you do.'

Cleo's laugh was quite enchanting but infuriating too.

'I honestly doubt that, Russell dear,' she purred. 'But never mind, honey. I shall solace you. Failing the house they may be at one of the poshest restaurants, the sort only the upper ten can afford, but I'll let you

take me to the Copper Cat. This is probably only a flash-in-the-pan with Dinah, if that's any consolation to you. Even the seemingly amenable ones kick over the traces sometimes - if they're neglected long enough. They long to go out with someone exciting, you know.'

The last phrase flicked Russell on the raw. *Someone exciting*. Well, perhaps *she'd* like someone exciting too... and Cleo Davies was certainly that. And he'd let Cleo see he wasn't such a stuffed shirt either!

In silence Anthony Bryn-Morgan and his secretary drove up from the Exchange when he circled back to it, and along Queen's Drive. As they turned into Harcourt Street he said, 'Not nearly so sultry as earlier, do you think?'

Laughter, spontaneous and carefree, had its way with her.

'N -no,' she agreed shakily. 'But the atmospherics have been so fluctuating I feel we could expect anything yet, don't you?'

'No. I feel the storm has cleared the air.'

He brought the car to a stop, looked down on her. 'It would be a fitting olive branch if you asked me in for a cup of tea.'

Dinah didn't reply at once.

He said provocatively, 'Or are you really concerned lest

Mr. Milgrove shouldn't approve?'

Stung, she looked up. 'Will you come in? My aunt is out at the art exhibition too, but she'll be in soon, I daresay.'

They mounted the steps, paused at the top to admire the spread of the city and suburbs before them, the harbour lying like a dark lake ringed by lights. Dinah had a sense of unreality as she fitted her key in the lock. She was bringing Anthony Bryn-Morgan in, not Russell.

In the living-room Anthony Bryn-Morgan looked at the set fire. 'I'd like to pretend it was chilly enough to light that, how about you?'

'Yes. Aunt Kate and I make any excuse to put it on, even if we have to sit well away from it. We like the look of it.' She bent to light it.

He looked up at the picture above the mantel, looked closer. 'Ah, I thought so. That's a Kate Livingstone picture. We've got a couple at home. Marvelous colouring, she keeps her palette clean and bright, doesn't she? And her pictures make sense.'

Dinah said demurely, 'You must tell Aunt Kate that when she comes in. She'll appreciate it all the more since you didn't know. It adds value to praise.' .

'Aunt Kate - Kate Livingstone... of course! Did Dad not know?'

'I don't suppose he thought of her as other than a Mrs. Livingstone, and my aunt.'

'No, probably not. Actually Dad knows nothing of art in any case, and they're really Aunt Hattie's pictures she bought them in England . She keeps house for me. I don't suppose Dad even knew who had painted them.'

Dinah said, 'I'll just switch on the jug.' Her employer followed her into their modern kitchen, brightly painted, with a bowl of bright scarlet geraniums on the laminex table and in one corner an old Welsh dresser Aunt Kate had found in an auction room, set out with willow ware and Cornish blue-and-white striped mixing bowls.

'This kitchen is just like you,' said Anthony. 'Full of contradictions. A red-headed lass, full of fighting spirit, falling for the prim and proper Russell Milgrove. Ye gods!'

Dinah swung round from the fridge she was opening for milk. 'Mr. Anthony, let's leave Russell out of it.'

'Suits me,' he said laconically. He peered over her shoulder. 'Are those chops and things for your breakfast?'

'Good heavens, no. How early do you think I get up? No, for our dinner tomorrow night.'

'Let's have them now. I'm starving. Fighting always did make me hungry. I'm a dab hand at a mixed grill. I'll take you and your aunt out tomorrow night instead. Bargain?'

'Yes - I mean no. I mean that you can have your mixed grill, but-'

'But you won't dine with me. Pity. It could easily bring the laggard lover up to scratch if he thought there was a little competition - Now, Dinah darling, don't get mad again. I forgot he was unmentionable!'

'*That* didn't put the sparkle in my eye. I did not say you could call me Dinah -*or* darling!'

He wasn't a whit perturbed, merely seized the chops and a knife and began to trim off fat. 'But it's such a delightful name, one that simply asks to have darling tacked on to it. Hand me that other knife, Dinah darling, you haven't got much of an edge on this one.'

Dinah gave up.

'These sausages are frightfully vicious,' said Mr. Anthony, dodging a splatter of fat. He picked up an apron, tied it round his middle, his immaculate middle.

Dinah, beginning to feel it was all delicious fun, and realizing she was hungry too, since she had eaten lightly at teatime to suit Cleo's lean purse, pulled the table out from the wall, put a lace cloth on it, set two

places, put a tiny vase of violets on it, made mustard, cut bread.

Mr. Anthony piled the results of their labours high on a hot ashet, bore it into the living-room with the air of a firstrate chef.

Dinah put a plate down for Sandra, and a saucer of milk.

Then they sat down themselves and tucked in. Dinah realized she hadn't been hungry lately, but now she was eating with an edge to her appetite that rivalled any she and David had ever raised after roaming the Welsh hills.

'A really good North ofEngland type supper,' said Mr. Anthony at last, with the greatest of satisfaction. He speared up the last savoury morsel of his pork-chop, added the last of the sausage, daubed on some apple sauce and was Just conveying it to his mouth when the door opened and there stood not only Kate Livingstone but also Russell Milgrove.

Dinah wanted to giggle at the look on both faces.

Mr. Anthony laid down his fork, dabbed at his lips with his napkin and rose. He still had the blue frilly apron on. Russell's eyes seemed glued to it.

She rose too, subduing her mirth. 'Oh, hullo, Russell. Aunt, this is my employer, the Bryn-Morgans' son, Mr. Anthony. I don't need to introduce you, Russell.'

'You certainly don't,' said Russell, and his words seemed to come from between his teeth.

Dinah added to Russell, 'Did Aunt Kate ask you to come along after the exhibition?'

'No. We met at the gate, just now.' His brow was like a thundercloud. 'I went to collect you, leaving the show early, but just missed you. I took Cleo to have a cup of coffee and then home, and decided to come on here.'

'How nice for Cleo,' said Dinah lightly. She added in a seemingly solicitous tone, 'But you shouldn't have come, Russ, as late as this. I don't like to think of you keeping your mother out of bed.'

She thought Mr. Anthony slightly choked on the last delicious mouthful he had returned to, but she couldn't spare him a full glance, she was too interested in noting that Russell had reddened slightly.

Anthony Bryn-Morgan rose from the table, pulled out Dinah's chair for her, with a few deft movements transferred the dishes to the tea-trolley, pushed it into the kitchen, saying with a deliberate proprietorial air that was intensely aggravating, 'We'll deal with those later now we've got company.'

He returned to the fireside, sat down, stretched his feet to the blaze, said, 'Ah, sheer bliss after the hectic day we've had, Dinah.'

She cast him a look Russell could not fathom. Not exactly provocative, more reminiscent really, enjoyably so, with a hint of mirth.

'Yes, praise the saints they aren't all like today, Anthony. Still, at last the shouting and the tumult died.'

Anthony! Russell was conscious of a slight sense of shock. So they were on Christian name terms!

Anthony was leaning forward, offering his cigarette-case to Aunt Kate, who took one. He said easily, 'I know you don't smoke, Dinah.' (No one would have dreamed he had found that out only half an hour ago, Dinah thought, her lips twitching.)

He continued, to Aunt Kate, 'I'd like you to see the pictures of yours that we have at home. I always tell my aunt she bought a Kate Livingstone, then proceeded to furnish the entire room around it. Her sitting-room. Yes, my aunt lives with me too. My Aunt Hattie. She'll be thrilled to have me bring you over.'

Dinah, watching with amusement, thought: 'No wonder Aunt Kate has fallen for him, hook, line and

sinker!'

Russell said, 'Oh, that reminds me, Dinah. I shan't be home myself tomorrow night, but Mother will. I've got to go down to see a man at Balciutha. Mother wanted to know if you would have dinner with her and keep her company for the evening, dear.'

For one mad moment Dinah considered saying she and Aunt Kate were having dinner out, with Mr. Anthony, but it was hardly fair to use him like that when she had said so tartly that she wouldn't.

She consented, trying to sound enthusiastic. A whole evening of Mrs. Milgrove's unadulterated company wasn't exactly an enthralling prospect.

She had an uneasy feeling that Russell and Mr. Anthony were going to try to sit each other out. The phone rang. Thankfully she went to answer it. As she came back to call Aunt Kate, she passed the open kitchen door and saw her employer neatly stacking the dishes.

She stopped dead, then went in. 'Mr. Anthony, you really don't need to do those. Aunt Kate and I will do them later. It's ridiculous.'

'It's also ridiculous,' he said, turning on the tap, 'to call me Anthony one moment and *Mr.* Anthony the next!' Dinah turned pink. 'I - I - it just slipped out.'

He shook his head at her. 'Dinah darling! And I could have staked my reputation, my slightly tarnished reputation, on your being truthful. You know perfectly well you did it to annoy Milgrove. A little of what I said this afternoon seems to have sunk in.'

Dinah said coldly, 'I'm supposed to be calling Aunt Kate to the phone, not bandying words with you.' She opened the door. 'Aunt Kate, it's for you. Someone from the Art Society.'

'Goodness, child. I thought it must have been for you, you were gone so long.'

'I delayed her,' said Anthony solemnly, and winked. Aunt Kate flashed him a beaming smile as she passed. She didn't know what it was all about, but she liked him.

Dinah shut the door into the kitchen and said in a low, almost vicious tone, 'I think it's about time you were going, Mr. Anthony. You've done an extraordinary amount of mischief in a very short time.'

The blue eyes danced. 'Yes, haven't I? You'll live to be grateful to me. Your adored Russell is just a little uneasy. He may not be so sure of you from now on, treat you so cavalierly. I did hate to see a girl like you making such a doormat of yourself.'

'What do you mean? Someone like me? You don't know me well at all.'

'I shan't tell you. Not yet. But don't fall into his arms and tell him it was all my doing. Wrong technique. Keep him guessing. Be honest and natural, Dinah, and admit you've really rather enjoyed baiting that poor mutt out there?'

Dinah said in a carefully controlled tone, 'I happen to be in love with that poor mutt. And don't make the obvious answer that love is blind.'

He shrugged. 'I'm not likely to. I belong to Barrie's school of thought.'

She looked a question at him.

'Barrie said: "Love is not blind ... it is an extra sense that shows what is most worthy of regard." And don't, don't, I implore you, Dinah, begin retailing Russell's virtues to prove there's something worthy of your regard. Or give me another dirty crack about being experienced in affairs of the heart. I know - only too well - what you're referring to, and believe me, there was no love in that.'

For one moment Anthony Bryn-Morgan's nonchalance deserted him and he looked grim. Dinah felt ashamed of herself, swallowed, could find no words. She knew so little about it.

She said, finally, a little wearily and entirely without enmity, 'Mr. Anthony, I've had about enough today.'

I feel you and Russell are quite mad enough to try to sit each other out, and I'm desperately tired. Could you, please, wangle things so that you and he leave together?'

'I'm a prime wangler,' said Mr. Anthony, 'and, unlike Milgrove, your slightest wish is law to me.'

Ten minutes later Aunt Kate and Dinah were sitting by the fire looking at each other.

There was a twinkle in Aunt Kate's shrewd hazel eyes. 'I have an idea, my love, that you've been having fun.'

Dinah said limply, 'I don't know. I'm all mixed up. I feel desperately in need of sleep.'

But she didn't sleep. Anthony Bryn-Morgan had banished sleep for her. Try as she would to turn her mind from its instinctive purpose, she kept relentlessly examining the situation as it stood between Russell and herself.

She tried desperately to recapture the dreamy sense of enchantment and fulfilment that had cast its spell about her in those first weeks of knowing each other ... she had thought him the man she had waited for till now.

Still, perhaps she had been so idealistic it hadn't altogether been fair to Russell. Had he not lost his father so young it might have been different. Mrs. Milgrove had tempered the wind a little too much for her son, sheltering him when a few bracing winds might have toughened him. Perhaps he did have in him the things Dinah wanted in a husband, they were there, buried beneath the cossetting of a lifetime, but could be brought out by the right sort of wife.

But now, analysing things mercilessly in the grey, depressing hour just before the dawn, she even wondered if she was the right sort of wife.

Then suddenly, in the midst of all her doubts and misery, she found herself laughing. It had been fun, after all, even if her employer had behaved shamelessly, to see Russell less sure of himself, of her. Dinah fell asleep on the thought, slept dreamlessly till the alarm went off, and woke to the new day with a sense of adventure and freedom that was more surprising in view of the fact that it held nothing more than the

prospect of a meal for two with smooth, patronizing Mrs. Milgrove.

CHAPTER SIX

THE day at Bryn-Morgan's had gone much as usual, except for a twinkle in Mr. Anthony's eye now and then when there was time for twinkling. It was a rushed day, with her employer away from the office for long times at a stretch for consultation with buyers and travellers. But at last it was over, and Dinah was putting on her loose white coat and hat ready to leave. .

Mr. Anthony came through the door. 'I'll drop you at Mrs. Milgrove's, Dinah.'

She said, stifled, unwilling for anything to start up again, No, thank you, Sir. I can make my own way there'

'But it's quite a tiring trip by crowded bus at this hour of the night.'

Dinah said quickly, 'I'm going by taxi.'

Dinah saw the laughter lines at his eyes crinkle deeply. Really? You have it ordered?'

Dinah bit her lip. He was capable, she knew of coming to the door with her just to put her out of countenance

'No, but I was just about to ring.'

He eyed her. You know, Miss Pritchard, you're turning into a first-class liar since - since I began taking an interest in you. I said I was taking you and I am.'

Dinah dropped her tawny lashes, unable to hold the bright, amused look in his eyes. 'Then I expect I shall have to allow you,' she said in a tone of irritatingly meek acceptance. After all, you are my employer, you more or less hold my weekly pay-packet in the hollow of your hand it wouldn't be policy to cross you.'

He gave a great shout of laughter. 'Oh, Dinah, Dinah darling, a lot you care for policy, a redhead like you. The real you. Not this tame creature you were trying to turn into to become the perfect helpmeet for a future Queen's Counsel. You only said that because you thought I would then stop coercing you.'

'Well, since it's my wish that you do, will you leave me alone?'

'No, darling. You love it really.'

'Love what? You mean-?'

'You love being coerced.'

'I think you must be mad,' said Dinah with conviction. 'One moment you tell me I make myself a doormat for Russell Milgrove, the next that I enjoy being pushed around by you. It doesn't make sense.'

He was lighting a cigarette and his eyes met hers over the flame of the lighter. 'There's all the difference in the world. I'm rushing you. But Russell- he's a reluctant wooer.' Dinah had a dreadful feeling she was going to burst into tears. This was humiliating. She rallied.

'Mr. Anthony, I admit Russell has broken engagements lately - but they were all incidental to his career. I haven't cared, I've understood.'

'Then why was one of my letters smudged the other week - after he had just rung you?'

She bit her lip. 'I don't profess to know why you've suddenly started to behave like this. You're getting

some odd and perverse satisfaction out of it, I believe. But please Russell and I will work out our own salvation. You're*not* taking me to Mrs. Milgrove's!

'I am, you know, Dinah.'

She lifted her chin. 'You can scarcely use force to get me into your car.'

'Oh, can't I? Just wait and see, my lass. I've had my car brought round to the staff entrance. You and I, my dear Dinah, are about to mingle with the homeward-bound tide of Bryn-Morgan's workers. I shall have you by the arm ... like this ... and if you don't step smartly into the front seat I shall pick you up ... like this ... and dump you in. Wouldn't the juniors enjoy it, darling? Can't you imagine the talk behind the counters tomorrow?' He put her on her feet again. 'Now, quick march!'

In silence they descended the stairs, Dinah looking straight ahead, seemingly unconscious of the hand cupping her elbow, the hand that would grip firmly the moment she tried to lose herself. Mr. Anthony exchanged small talk easily with this one and that, as the tide of people flowed down the stairs.

Dinah was conscious of eyes boring into her back as she was handed solicitously into the sleek black car. She sat in an offended silence:

They swept up the dense drive bordered by rhododendrons and lilacs and came to a stop outside the dark brick house.

Anthony Morgan looked up at its square front. 'Exactly what you'd expect, isn't it? It will go beautifully with- wigs and gowns.'

Dinah had her hand on the handle ready to leap out, but as frustrated to find that for some reason she could not get it open. Before she could discover the knack her employer was out and opening it for her.

He said softly, smiling; 'I'll see you later. About ten-thirty, say. Hope you have a pleasant evening.'

His tone hoped she'd have nothing of the sort, It brought her to words. 'See me later? Oh, no. You live twenty miles out, don't you?'

'I'm going back to the office after dinner in town. Alone.'

She said, desperately, 'But Russell will be taking me home.'

He said sweetly, 'He won't be home early enough. He said, "It will be a late sitting, and Balciutha is fifty miles away, Dinah, but I'll see you Thursday." Remember?'

She said· hastily, knowing Mrs. Milgrove might appear any moment and goodness knows what he might say to her, in this mood, Mr. Anthony, please stop this nonsense. It's gone far enough. I'll take a taxi home.*You must not come.* '

She walked up to the front door, her back stiff, yet trembling, and rang the bell. As Anthony saw her admitted he turned the car, signalled a gay salute on his horn, waved, disappeared into the dark tunnel of the shrubs.

'Who was that, dear? What an opulent-looking car.' Dinah's tone was light. 'It's opulent with very good reason. That was my chief, Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan.' She found she was actually enjoying saying that to Mrs.

Milgrove. What a very horrid nature she must have.

Mrs. Milgrove blinked. 'Was he visiting up this way?'

As if that was the only reason any man would offer her a lift!

Dinah said sweetly, 'He thought the Maori Hill buses were too crowded for me after a big day, so he brought me, up.'

Mrs. Milgrove said nothing. .

When they got to the bedroom she said, 'I'm so looking forward to having you to myself.' A charming thing to say, so why should it make Dinah feel uneasy?

It was an excellent meal, served with a polished perfection that made Dinah wonder if she would ever be able to keep up a standard like it. It would mean concentrating all the time on perfection. Not leaving any time for hobbies, for the sheer joy of living, for doing mad, unexpected things, bobbing off at a moment's inspiration, for an all-day picnic among the hills, taking your children for a nature ramble, and recking not what time it was.

Dinah went through each course, the toheroa soup, creamy in texture, and faintly and attractively green, the glazed brown chicken, the puffy bed of rice, the chopped peppers, the unusual sauces, the trifles in their long.med glasses, as exquisitely arranged as the centrepiece of flowers.

Dinah felt nostalgic for last night's hastily cooked grill, the jar of pickled onions Anthony had set on the table, despite her protests that they should be in a dish. 'Heavens, girl,' he had said, 'we're having a snack, not a posh meal, you and your lace tablecloth!'

She accepted coffee and cheese straws, deliciously melting.

Later they sat round an electric heater in Mrs. Milgrove's own sitting-room.

'Much too warm for fires snow. I never light fires once we get into October. Ridiculous to have one at this time of year, fires make a lot of work.'

She took up the Russell saga again; it had continued nonstop practically right through the meal.

Mrs. Milgrove smiled creamily at Dinah. 'I wanted to tell you that now I've got to know you better how happy I am that you and Russell have - have come together.' '

Dinah noticed the pause. Not 'That you and Russell have fallen in love with each other', but 'have come together'. She supposed that just about described the lukewarmness of their relationship these days. Oh dear, her thoughts were cynical tonight.

Mrs. Milgrove continued: 'His ... er ... other attachment was so unsuitable, but of course he was so young. Just a wild infatuation.'

Dinah stirred restlessly. She knew there had been something, but she would rather have Russell tell her. Mrs. Milgrove could so easily misinterpret things.

'When it was all over I said to Russell that he would benefit by the experience in time, that the next time "he would learn to curb his emotions, to bring his reasoning powers to bear upon his choice of a wife. That was why I didn't want to rush into an engagement this time. Two broken engagements would have a bad effect upon' his career.

'But I am ...*now* ... very happy about you. I feel that with a little help from me, which I trust you will not be too proud to accept, you will make Russell that sort of wife he needs.'

The sort of wife Russell needs! What about the sort of husband/ need?

But she had the feeling she ought to endeavour to look gratified. Mrs. Milgrove expected it. She smiled rather uncertainly.

Encouraged, Mrs. Milgrove went on. 'There's only one thing ... I've always' found names are important; *Some* names are so dignified - Elizabeth, Jane, Mary, Anne, others not*quite* so. I wondered, well-' She hesitated, suddenly catching a strange glint in Dinah's eye.

Dinah leaned forward. 'You mean you don't like*my* name?'

'Well, no. It's - it's not a usual name, is it? Dinah sounds like a coal-black mammy. You know-'

'I don't really. And if I did, is there anything nicer than a coal-black mammy? They're wonderful people. They sound so lovely. Those incomparable lullabies.'

'Yes, yes. Well, Dinah is all right for them, but not for-'

Dinah said gently, oh, much too gently, 'But not for Russell's wife. Not for a Q.C.'s wife. Is that it?'

'Yes.' Mrs. Milgrove even sounded gratified that Dinah had understood her so. 'So I thought you wouldn't mind if we called you Diana from now on. I asked Russell the other day if he liked Diana for a name. He does.'

Dinah blinked. 'Does he know why you asked him?'

'Yes, of course, I told him.'

Dinah drew in a deep breath. 'I think perhaps you don't know very much about names, Mrs. Milgrove. I've nothing against Diana, in fact I like it as a name, but it is the name of a heathen goddess, even if it's a popular name in modern times. Whereas Dinah is a Biblical name. Apart from that, it's *my* name, the name my father and mother gave me at my baptism, so let me hear no more of this nonsense!'

Mrs. Milgrove's mouth fell open. 'Why, Dinah, I didn't think you'd be offended over so small a matter. It was just that I had your best interests at heart.'

Dinah's eyes, disbelieving, met hers in a level look. Mrs. Milgrove had the uncomfortable feeling, rare to her, that she had been impertinent in even mentioning the subject.

Dinah said, 'My interests ... or Russell's?'

Mrs. Milgrove said flutteringly, 'Why, Dinah, I believe you really are angry. *I am* surprised.'

Dinah thought there were probably many more surprises in store for her.

She said distantly, 'I was also surprised. I didn't think anyone would ever have such effrontery.'

Mrs. Milgrove moistened her lips. 'Dear, you know I wouldn't intentionally hurt you. Not many girls have the full approval of their mother-in-law as you have, and-' Dinah interrupted sharply, 'You're not my mother-in-law, Mrs. Milgrove.'

'But I - well, next door to it. I meant your mother-to-be. Now come-'

Dinah held up her ringless left hand. 'We aren't even engaged.'

'Well, not yet, dear, but you have an understanding with each other. That's-'

Dinah laughed shortly. 'Yes, an understanding. That's very satisfactory to a girl, isn't it? All privileges, no ties. For the man. All other men warned off ... while he makes up his mind if she'll be a suitable wife or not. Makes a girl feel like goods on approval.'

Mrs. Milgrove became agitated. Russell could call her to book for this .. Dinah, I didn't mean to upset you. Are you not feeling well? Do you-'

'I'm perfectly well. But I feel this is between Russell and myself. As you say, people need to be very careful before going into marriage. Not only the man has to be careful.'

Mrs. Milgrove panicked. 'I - I feel you're not yourself.'

'I assure you I'm very much myself.' Dinah's lip twitched.

Mrs. Milgrove clutched at a straw. She didn't want Russell to think she had upset things.

'Dinah, have you and Russell quarrelled? Have you ... oh but no, I would have known if you had.'

'Known? How?'

'Russell would have told me. He tells me everything. He always has, right from a child.'

It was Dinah's turn to stare. Then she laughed. 'Oh no Mrs. Milgrove, he doesn't.'

Dinah's tone was so convincing, her smile so indicative of the fact that she was remembering tenderness that no son would confide to his mother, that something very akin to hatred showed in Mrs. Milgrove's eyes for a moment.

'I can assure you he does,' she snapped.

Dinah's laugh was really amused now. 'Did he tell you he took Cleo Davies out last night?'

Mrs. Milgrove's mouth fell open again. 'Cleo? you mean - you don't mean - that girl at the shop?'

Dinah's eyes were witch-green. 'Yes, the dazzling silverblonde from the beauty bar. Cleopatra's Corner. Now there's a name for you, Mrs. Milgrove. Cleopatra!'

Mrs. Milgrove drew in her breath. 'I - you - he - I don't understand. Dinah dear, you'd better tell me all about it. I'll see Russell. No wonder you were upset. How did you find out?'

A dimple quivered at the edge of Dinah's mouth. 'He told me,' she said demurely.

'He told you?'

'Yes. He came over to our place afterwards. She smiled wickedly. 'You see, he took Cleo out because I had gone out with Anthony Bryn-Morgan.' She smiled to herself again and added dreamily, in an intentionally irritating way, 'Now he's very fond of Dinah for a name.'

Mrs. Milgrove's mouth fell open again. Dinah almost felt sorry for her. Almost.

Mrs. Milgrove said, 'But - but - why? What made you-?'

Dinah said firmly, 'These understandings work both ways. I'm not tied either, you see. In the language of the drapery world I love so much these days, I've got Russell only on apron!'

Mrs. Milgrove recovered herself. She leaned forward, put a hand on Dinah's knee, said, 'Dinah, this is no tune for you to play fast and loose with Russell.'

'Why?' Dinah had a sudden, instinctive feeling that here, at last, was what Mrs. Milgrove had asked her over for. 'Because Jenny is back in town. The girl Russell used to be engaged to.'

Dinah laughed. 'Why should I worry about that? I imagine it's over and done with.'

She surprised a genuinely anxious look on the older woman's face and leaned forward. 'But you're not sure, are you? That means you think his love for me isn't quite strong enough to resist the pull of a former attachment?'

Mrs. Milgrove said hesitantly, 'Not exactly, but ... well, he did worship the ground she walked on.'

Ah, here was the crux of the matter. This was why Mrs. Milgrove had so disapproved of Jenny. At first

she had been afraid that Russell would love Dinah as he had once loved Jenny, therefore she had been antagonistic. Her possessiveness had dreaded sharing her son's affection. But she no longer actively resented Dinah because she sensed that here the bond was not quite so strong. So ...

'And you think *I* would be content to be Russell's second best?'

She couldn't help feeling sorry for Mrs. Milgrove with a wry sort of sympathy. She had ordered and controlled her son's life so long, something that had been grossly unfair to him, but this interview, at least, wasn't going just as she had planned it.

She laughed softly. 'I think having an understanding and not a formal engagement was a very good idea. Not only for Russell's sake but for my own. We've *both* had goods out on approval. It's not to say either of us wants to buy.'

She thought she liked Mrs. Milgrove just one degree better agitated than oily and bland.

'But, Dinah, this isn't the moment to take up an attitude like that. I told you Jenny was back in town. She's up at Wakari Hospital. If you knew her you would realize-' Her voice tailed off, aware that to continue, with Dinah in this mood, would be courting danger.

Dinah finished it for her. 'If I saw her I would realize it would take me all my time to hold my own with Russell against her. I wonder you don't realize yourself how undermining to my confidence that is. My confidence in Russell. I want a husband I can be sure of. If the attraction is still strong, I think it just as well to test it before marriage. And I would also like to test my own feelings for Russell. I'm not at all sure they are what I imagined at first. Maybe I was just infatuated.'

Dinah didn't know if that were true or not. It was just fierce pride swamping her usual integrity. She did love Russell, she must. But she wasn't going to be a doormat. Meantime she thought she had had quite enough of Mrs. Milgrove for one night.

'Do you mind if I use your phone, Mrs. Milgrove?'

Mrs. Milgrove didn't. She was extraordinarily glad to have the conversation slide back suddenly to

ordinary levels.

Dinah picked up the receiver, she knew the number, of course. Mr. Anthony's voice came to her. 'Bryn-Morgan and Son here.'

Her voice was warm, friendly, surprisingly so to the man at the other end.

'Is that you, Anthony? I find I'm ready to leave a little earlier than I'd said. Would you like to come over for me now?'

A fraction of a pause before he answered, 'Yes, Dinah darling. What happened to de-frost you? Evening not go too well?'

She said deliberately, 'That will be lovely. Just as soon as you can, Anthony. Good-bye.'

It certainly didn't take him long. Dinah went to the door, brought him in, broad-shouldered, extremely well turned out, very much Anthony Bryn-Morgan of Bryn-Morgan's. He was quite wickedly charming to Mrs. Milgrove, and to outward appearances unaware that he was doing anything odd in calling for a girl to escort her home from her near fiance's place. Mrs. Milgrove could have been some old family friend, and he Dinah's usual escort.

Out of the corner of her eye Dinah saw Mrs. Milgrove's mouth was falling open. The sooner she got Anthony away the better. The poor soul had had enough shocks for one evening.

'As Anthony started the car he said, 'I'm afraid Mrs. Milgrove is completely baffled.'

'It was very good for her,' said Dinah firmly.

'Oho. What happened, Dinah darling?'

Dinah felt slightly ashamed. It was monstrous to use her employer this way, especially when she had been so scathing to him earlier.

'I - I ought to apologize to you for using you so, Mr. Anthony. It was an Irresistible temptation to score off her. A very unworthy thing to do.'

'But very understandable.'

Dinah was silent. Perhaps it was the natural swing of the pendulum away from the critical and confidence-destroying atmosphere of the earlier evening, but she felt most grateful to Mr. Anthony for rescuing her and for being so kind.

She suddenly noticed they had dipped down to Kaikorai valley and were running up the next hill towards Wakari. Where are we going?" she asked.

'To a favourite spot of ours. Owen and Megan and I used to climb every much of Mount Flagstaff when we were kids Lately I've come here by myself when I've wanted to thrash thing~ out. You can run up a rough little road, then climb up the hill to the summit, and see for miles.'

They bumped and jolted over the road that was little more than a cart-track. It was certainly terrifically lonely. And at the top, above the bush, was a tussocky bare crest. The walk, uphill, did Dinah good. The air came sweetly into her lungs. Anthony helped her over the rough parts.

They sat down on an outcrop of rock, the gentle zephyrs of the night fanning Dinah's hot cheeks.

'Care to tell me about tonight, Dinah?' he asked, and suddenly she wanted to. He turned and looked at her. Suddenly, to her horror, she felt the tears well up and overflow. This was terrible. She would like to have told him about it humorously as, in spite of inner pain, she had taken it at the time. But ...

The next moment his arm was about her shoulders and a comfortingly large handkerchief in her hand. His voice said, 'Let it go, Dinah. I've seen this coming.'

One part of her mind was completely horrified. To lose control like this, in front of one's employer ... it was past enduring. The other part realized that it was vastly comforting. That this man had the power to solace, to understand, as Russell never would. Perhaps it was because of his own imperfections. Rectitude did not always go hand-in-hand with kindness.

His other hand covered hers, strong, warm, his forefinger rubbing up and down across her fingers.

Dinah mopped up the tears, blew her nose, sat up, taking her head from Mr. Anthony's shoulder.

'I detest females who break down and cry,' she said with fury.

Anthony said, 'I detest the ones who use it as a weapon to get their own way, who dab pathetically at starry eyelashes, milking sure their mascara doesn't run, but anyone who goes at it as thoroughly as you doesn't alarm me in the least. And it's a safety valve.'

Dinah reflected that he knew a good deal about women. He added, 'Perhaps you'd rather not tell me. Now that you've had a good weep perhaps you don't need to confide in anyone.'

Dinah said in a very small voice, 'I'd like to tell you. I do feel humiliated, but after all, you already know some of it, so it doesn't matter with you. You know that of late I've tried to make myself over to suit the Milgroves - made myself a doormat. I thought you were crazy and-' She hesitated.

He twinkled down on her. 'No more repressions, Dinah.

Speak what's in your mind. You thought I was impertinent and interfering and goodness knows what else, but I did show you where you were wrong.'

'Yes,' she said gratefully. 'I can't believe - even now that I'm unburdening myself to my employer.'

His expression was quizzical. 'Can't you forget I'm your employer? Fire ahead.'

Dinah said breathlessly, 'I think - if you're willing - you could help me.'

'Help you to what, Dinah?'

'To a happy ending.'

'Who for?'

'A happy ending for me and Russell, of course.'

There was an odd look on his face. She added quickly, 'Not that I'd ever have thought about asking you, except that you-'

He stopped her. 'I'll be very happy to help you, Dinah. And by the way, my friends call me Tony, dear girl.'

She said frankly, 'It doesn't come easy. I've always thought of you as Mr. Anthony, even sir.'

'I can understand that, but it will come. And if you're sincere In wanting me to spur the reluctant Russell on, you'll need to call me that In front of Mrs. Milgrove and Russell. We'll keep them guessing a little longer. Russell was decidedly intrigued last night. He wanted that understanding to be binding on your Side, but not on his, I imagine. All right, lass, give him a run for his money. I'll lend a hand.'

Suddenly Dinah felt quite lighthearted. But there was a protest she must make.

'The only thing is that it's hardly fair to you, Mr. An- I mean Tony. There'll be talk in the shop. Already-'

'Already they're wondering, and that was my doing, not yours. I've survived much more malicious talk than that.' His tone sounded a little grim. 'Then it's a bargain. Mind you stick to it. Mind you play up to me. Now, let's forget it. Come across the shoulder of the hill here, there's a marvellous view there.'

They walked across the turf to the rim of the hill; the air was a little sharper here, it was not quite so sheltered.

The breeze rippled back the hair from Dinah's forehead blowing a strand back across Mr. Anthony's face. She put up a hand to smooth it back, found him disturbingly near. She was suddenly aware of him as a man, not as a confidant. His blue eyes in the moonlight were very bright. His voice was cool, drawing.

'I deserve something for my services, don't I?' he demanded.

She stepped back in sudden alarm. She was caught, held, drawn against him. He tilted her chin up, looked teasingly down into her eyes, brought his mouth down on hers.

Suddenly she felt reckless, relaxed in his grip, returned his kiss. Very slowly he took his lips from hers. The twinkle was still in his eyes.

'Fire under the ice all right,' he remarked with satisfaction. 'That was all a kiss should be, wasn't it? Nothing of the "one to kiss and one to turn the cheek" about that kiss, was there? You've heard that old French proverb, I suppose? It wouldn't do me, and I don't think it would do you. Not redheads.'

Suddenly a burning blush swept Dinah's cheeks. She ought to have resisted that impulse to respond. Because this was only a gesture on his part to restore the confidence Russell and his mother between them had shaken.

She looked at him frankly, though her voice wasn't very steady. 'You don't need to go as far as that. I'll be quite content if you just play your part when Russ is about. No girl likes to be kissed because a man is sorry for her. You're kind ... even philanthropic ... but you needn't bother to that extent.'

Anthony Bryn-Morgan just laughed. He was still holding her. 'Oh, Dinah, Dinah darling! It was the effect of the moonlight, and your nearness - not kindness, not philanthropy. What an idea! Nothing academic or calculated about that kiss, believe me. You goose! You don't know men very well, do you? Pity Russell had to be the one to awaken you. I could teach you a few things!'

He laid his cheek against her hot one. 'This is going to be fun,' he said.

Dinah had an instant sense of misgiving. No, she didn't know men very well. And she must remember Anthony Bryn-Morgan didn't have a very good reputation.

He released her. 'Now, let's go gently and peaceably home ... you to your aunt, I to mine. Sounds quite Victorian, doesn't it?'

Perhaps it did, thought Dinah, as they dipped down the valley road, but she had a sense of being committed to something of which she was most unsure.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MR. ANTHONY wasn't one to let the grass grow under his feet. He said the next morning during a lull, 'Well, how about the week-end? What are we doing?'

Dinah showed hesitation.

He grinned. 'I mean have you got firm plans with Milgrove or-?'

'We - we had intended going to the Operatic Society, but we're going later next week instead. It so happens that Russell has someone coming to stay this week-end, someone well up in legal circles in Christchurch.'

'And he doesn't want you round? Doesn't want to show you off? What's wrong with the fellow?'

Dinah still had the feeling that, in all loyalty, she must try to defend Russell. She picked her words carefully. 'Well, you see, not being formally engaged makes it a little awkward. It wasn't Russell really. I suggested to Russell that he should be quite free this week-end - after Mrs. Milgrove very obliquely let me know that this man had once met Jenny - the girl Russell used to be engaged to, met her at their house, and she didn't want him to think Russell was a man who couldn't make up his mind, and seeing nothing was definite between us, well - what did you say, Mr. Anthony?'

'I said hell! And no apologies. That woman should have her neck wrung and you know it. Right, you and I go to the opera;' He looked sharply at her. 'You like opera, I suppose?'

'No, I don't. I'm one of the odd bods who prefers the spoken word,' she grinned, 'and dear Russell felt he should educate me to like it. Said he hoped it didn't mean I lived on the surface of things.'

'Good lord, and what did you say to that? Hope you haven't taken everything lying down.'

She chuckled. 'I said, "Hardly! Since I love Shakespeare. He didn't skim the emotions, did he? In fact he was stark. I mean, think of "Othello", Mr Anthony.'

'Yes. Perhaps Milgrove enjoys his emotions vicariously. He certainly doesn't live life fully and joyously himself. Well there's no Shakespeare on at the moment, but the Southern Comedy players are putting on "Love in a Mist" - how about that? A bit of witty nonsense is the very thing you need after an overdose of the Milgroves!'

Dinah agreed.

He got up from his desk, smiled down on her. 'And you can let yourself go in anticipation ... I'll let nothing interfere with that date.'

Rash words.

He rang her that night from Tangaroa.

'Aunt Hattie has an idea, and when Aunt Hattie has ideas I always co-operate. Might as well.'

Dinah broke in. 'I'd like to see that. Mostly you get your own way, don't you?'

'Dinah darling, that *is not* a nice thing to say. Now listen – she is dying to meet you - but even more she's dying to meet Kate Livingstone. So she's decided you must both come out to Tangaroa for the week-end. I'll come and get you early Saturday morning. It's quite lovely at the Bay. Do you ride? Oh, good. And we've a launch. And Aunt Hattie and Aunt Kate can entertain each other.'

'Mr. Anthony ... all right, I mean Tony, I don't think it's wise. The staff-'

'The staff will talk. I know. You said it before. I also said I didn't care, that I'd survived gossip before. And this is open and above board. What does it matter? Dad took Mother out quite openly, and she was one of the girls behind the counter - did you know that?'

'That was quite different - he meant marriage. This is only play-acting.'

There was a silence. Then he said, 'Well, that's settled.'

'I'll come at nine-thirty.'

To her surprise Dinah found Aunt Kate most approving.

'His father and mother will have expected us to visit them by now. They're coming home in December, aren't they? I feel I only know town life in New Zealand so far; and to combine farm and sea is ideal, just like home, Di.'

Dinah gave in. Between Tony Bryn-Morgan, his aunt, her aunt, she might as well.

They took the Bay Road on the far side of the harbour. It was flat, skirting the sea, but cut into the hills where they rose straight from the harbour. All around the bays were suburbs, sitting fairly in the sun on this side.

They came into Portobello lying below Harbour Cone.

They crested the Hill and came into Tangaroa Bay with its small jetty reflected perfectly in the still waters of the harbour, its road clustered with blue gums.

They swung up into the hills past a tiny church dwarfed by its trees, a store, a petrol station, and then branched off into a rutty, pine-bordered lane that wound steeply up.

. 'This goes nowhere except to the farm. It's all ours, except for hikers.'

They swung round to the left and there above them, beneath the curious formation of Tangaroa itself, lay the farmhouse, indented into the hillside.

'Oh, how lovely! A hill farm, part and parcel of the landscape,' said Dinah, her beauty-loving eyes embracing it.

It was white with black facings and an orange-painted tin roof, with a loggia built out above the terraced garden. The pillars were wreathed with wistaria and early roses. Dogs barked, racing down to the car as it swept up the circular drive to the front steps.

A small figure appeared at the open door, came running, dashing down the steps in careless haste.

'Look at her,' said Anthony. 'Never known to walk if she can run! Aunt Hattie, my love, watch out ...

you'll finish up in the Bay.'

She was younger than Dinah had imagined; she must be in her late fifties; and despite her tiny build, looked tough. She held out both hands in greeting.

'How good of you to come. I'm so excited. Mrs. Livingstone, this is a red-letter day for me. I just can't believe it. Dinah, aren't you lucky having such a famous aunt? Tony has to put up with me. I have no talents, no arts. I can only bake and brew.'

'That,' said her nephew, 'is inverted humility. Or do I mean perverted? She's so darned good a cook she couldn't possibly have an inferiority complex, and her parsnip wine is so potent that it can only be sipped in thimblefuls. Well evidently there's no need for introductions.' He picked up their week-end bags. 'This way. Aunt Hattie's much too overcome to think about showing her guests to their rooms. Come on, Dinah darling.'

Dinah said in a low voice as they went upstairs, 'Tony, you were only calling me darling to aggravate Russell. What's your aunt going to think?'

'Exactly what you think she'll think ... that I've fallen for you. She'll be so pleased. She's been trying to get her sister in Auckland to return to the South ever since she was widowed too. She'll be writing to her pronto. They aim to set up house together whenever I take the plunge.'

'Well, it serves you right if you find yourself without a housekeeper.'

He only laughed. 'I've given you a room each. This is a little wing on its own, if you can call it by anything so grand; you'll have to mind that step. This was evidently built on after - for the previous owner's elderly parents I believe. Down we go.'

It went off the main landing, two bedrooms and a bathroom. The window at the end of the small passage looked across the sparkling harbour towards the heads. The window was open and a springy piece of wistaria peeped inside.

'Oh, it's charming, Tony. I'm going to enjoy my week-end. I love where we live, but I was country born

and bred.'

The blue eyes looked down into hers. 'I'm planning to enjoy my week-end too.' He bent his head, brushed his lips tantalizingly across hers. Dinah turned and looked out of the window. She must expect that, she supposed.

She had expected, before she saw the house, to spend the week-end in some ultra-modern house. The rooms were quite-small, old-fashioned, with slanting ceilings. Hers had a quaint paper on it, sprigged with lilac and true lovers' knots. An old lady's choice. It was quite charming. Its Window looked down on to the terraces. They leaned out of it.

Dinah sniffed appreciatively. 'Sheep!' she said.

He laughed. 'Some don't like it.'

'And what's that tangy smell? Sort of spicy, astringent?'

'The blue-gum leaves. They're very aromatic. I like to pick their counters up and carry them round in my pocket. I mean the sort of nuts they shed. We used to use them as counters at school in the primers. They're Australian, but do very well here, so do the wattles - mimosa to you. We've got a wattle grove, over the other side of the hill. The kids call it the Enchanted Wood.'

'The kids?'

'Megan's children, my sister's. They're farming too, but up in Central Otago, on the shores of Lake Hayes. A ravishing spot. One of our smaller lakes but exquisite, a dream in autumn with its poplars. And we go up in Winter a lot too for the snow sports, go across to Coronet Peak above Queenstown. That's as good as you can get.'

'Sounds most attractive. I've wanted to see right into Central ever since I read that Lord Cobham had said when leaving here that of all their memories of New Zealand he believed that the picture which would be most indelibly stamped would be that of Central Otago. I suppose you read it too? He said, "I love everything about it - we both do; its ferocity, its fantastic colours, its great variations of temperature." It

made me long to see it.'

'You'll see it - and soon. Aunt Hattie said as soon as she knew Kate Livingstone was your aunt that we must take you up to the Stables. She's dying for your aunt to start painting Central. We took over some old stone stables on Megan's husband's property quite near the lake edge and made it into our holiday home.'

Dinah said quickly, 'Oh, we don't want to be nuisances. Aunt Kate and I thought we might go up there Show week-end. To Queenstown. We can do our sightseeing ourselves, Tony. We mustn't impose on you.'

He chuckled. 'Oh, give over. I wouldn't ask you if I didn't want to. Besides, all you have to think of is how it will spur Russell on. Come on down. I want to go down to the drive entrance. As we came over I saw yet another hedgehog fall into the cattle-stops. It's a real trap for them.'

Dinah said a little apprehensively, 'What are you going to do?'

'Fish it out and put it well away from there. At present I'm fishing them out night and morning. That's one thing about winter, they're hibernating. Come down for the walk.'

It was gloriously hot, with the ground so dry that heat seemed to come up as well as down.

In the pit under the bars of the cattle-stop that saved so much gate-closing, the hedgehog was standing on its hind legs, its snout weaving to and fro in its hopeless quest to climb out. Anthony lay down, pushed his hand through the bars, and was just able to get his fingers round a clump of quills, and very carefully and slowly withdraw the hedgehog.

He deposited it near Dinah, where it immediately curled into a tight, defensive ball. 'Race you back to the house,' he said. Dinah had to stop half-way, she was out of breath. He waited for her.

She paused, panting, looking about her, giving herself over to the enchantment of it all. Because it was just that. Far headlands past the shimmer of the harbour water, an island or two, trees breaking the skyline, the sweep of the hills above and below old Tangaroa, sheep on the yellowgreen hillsides, a hedge

of hawthorn clotted with cream blossom and rosily splashed with pink. All the homely' country noises, dogs barking, horses neighing, the occasional low of a cow, hens cackling, the sound of a tractor on a distant paddock the heart-catching sweetness of the bleating of lambs at play, the grunt of a pig in the oak plantation rooting for last autumn's acorns.

They had hot scones, feather-light, crammed with currants, scalding tea, then a quick changing to something suitable for riding in and presently the incomparable feel of horseflesh under one, the musical jingle of the steel parts of the bit the creak of saddle-leather.

They rode round the hills, dipping into gullies, making an easy pace, for it was no sort of terrain for gallop. Anthony stopped here and there to examine a sheep. Then they dropped down to a huddle of buildings below them, fetching up at a pleasant, wide-set farmhouse where the Kahikas lived. ... Airini's family fascinated Dinah. Her father, surprisingly, had blue eyes, very attractive in that brown, seamed kace, with the grizzled hair above it. Her mother was even better looking than Airini, she must have been a great beauty in her young days, and there were half a dozen brothers and sisters, 11 younger than Airini. Aunt Kate would want to paint them, she knew. The youngest, Henare, a four-year-old named after his politician uncle, was adorable.

'Can I come up on your mare, Uncle Tony?' he asked. Tony swung him up. 'We're going for a gallop on the beach, seeing the tide's out, Hal. But I'll bring you back up before we go back.'

Airini's father said, 'Now, I'm quite satisfied. I did want to see the girl who could take old Silverson off his feet. Hardest man in the All Black team to tackle, they used to say. If only I'd seen it, Dinah!'

Small Henare, from his perch, said proudly, 'Dad was an All Black too. Bet he was as hard to tackle as Old Silverson.'

'Mr. Silverson to you, son,' said Mr. Kahl and he was years before me, anyway, even if in your eyes I'm pretty ancient.'

'What's ancient, Tony?'

'Old. Like me and your dad. Well, off we go, hang on.'

How exhilarating it was to race along the hard sand, the fair breeze in your face. They took the mounts into the water, both animals revelling in it. They had needed exercising.

They dropped Henare at the farm, went home by the road, meeting quite a number of people. This was a different Mr. Anthony. Here he wasn't the employer, the successful business man, he was just a fellow-farmer, and a well-liked one.

Lunch was ready on the loggia, overlooking the harrbour.,

'Are you two coming out on the launch this afternoon?' asked Anthony.

The two aunts refused so promptly and without shilly-shallying about studying each other's preferences that Dinah had an immediate certainty that they had already discussed the probability of being asked and had decided against it. It made her feel uncomfortable.

'I think they'll get to know each other better without us, don't you, Dinah? Mind if we skip helping with the washing up? We'll want to get back for the milking. It's got to be early tonight too. Peter's going out tonight as well. It's their first wedding anniversary.'

'And you could do with forty winks before dinner,' said his aunt severely. She turned to Dinah. 'He was up most of last night with a sick ewe. So was Peter. And he was tired enough when he got in after ten after late night at the shop. He didn't get to bed till after three.'

Dinah said promptly, 'Then why don't we stay in tonight? I could enjoy a night here just as much, perhaps more. It's twenty miles each way.'

'No fear. I'm not standing you up. I've lost sleep before now and made it up in one night.'

'It really wouldn't matter. I mean it, Tony.'

'I know you do, Dinah darling, but no. However, we'll come back in reasonable time. Because I want to shave my moustache off. Dinah thinks it's a sign of male vanity, don't you, Dinah?'

She blushed, cast him an indignant look. 'Oh well, now you've told both aunts, perhaps you'll shut up about it, or do you want to tell your aunt too all about our first unorthodox interview?'

'She'd never believe it. She's used to me being treated with the greatest deference.'

Mrs. Hatfield said severely, 'She's used to you talking a great deal of nonsense. It's time you had that wretched moustache off. You could have weeks ago. The scar should be completely healed by now.'

'Scar?' Dinah's tone held horror, humiliation.

'Yes. Didn't he tell you? It was a year ago in the big fire at the shop. He had to go up toBurwoodHospital in Christchurch for a bit of plastic surgery. A wonderful job they made of it.'

'He was burnt?'

'No, gashed. Getting out of a window with-'

'That's enough, Aunt Hattie. It's history now, dead as mutton. Dinah, there's an old yachting cap here you can have, I suppose like me you sunburn easily. You won't want a scarlet nose for the theatre tonight. Come on.'

Dinah said calmly, 'I'll come just as soon as I hear how you came by that scar. Yes, Mrs. Hatfield, getting out of the window with-?'

'Getting out of the window on to the shop veranda with Mrs. Betson in his arms. Poor old Betsy had got left behind and overcome with the smoke. He went back in. He got terrible gashes in his arm too.'

'In fact,' said Anthony solemnly, 'I was a ruddy hero! For goodness' sake come on. Fond aunts are even worse than doting mothers, I can't abide them. See you later, aunties dear!'

Dinah didn't say anything for quite some time. They were well out in the harbour and cruising round some of the smaller bays towards the Heads.

She was standing beside him at the wheel. He had his sleeves rolled up. She looked down at his inner left forearm, put her hand on it, traced with a gentle finger the thick scar that ran most of its length.

She looked up at him, he looked down on her. The side of his mouth quirked up. 'It's all right, Dinah. You don't have to feel bad about it. Actually what you said at the time made me feel good. I was sure till then that even under the moustache it was still apparent.'

But Dinah had tears in her eyes. She didn't say anything what could one say? Instead she said, 'Will you let me help milk? I love the feel of my head against a cow's flanks ... or is it all machine milking?'

'Usually, but we've one cow being milked by hand at present, so you can have her. She ripped her udder trying to fence-jump. It's pretty well healed.'

'Did you stitch it up yourself?'

'Yes, I can manage most things, and Peter, my manager, is getting qwite good at it now too. Not much experience, but he's getting it fast. We're rather far from a vet here for minor injuries.' They got deep in a technical discussion on modern methods and drugs used in a veterinary way.

Suddenly Anthony laughed. Dinah looked at him inquiringly.

'I was just thinking what a severely practical turn the conversation has taken. I bet you little thought when you called me, at our first meeting, a wolf, I mean a rake, that the two of us would find animal husbandry an absorbing topic!'

She laughed with him. 'You've got me puzzled in more ways than one.'

'Such as?'

'Why are you doing this? Playing up to spur Russell on. It's knight-errantry of a sort - or is it?'

He looked at her sideways with a blue twinkle. 'Got you guessing, have I? I'll leave it that way just now. My motives may not be of the purest. No, definitely not in keeping with the Round Table.'

Again Dinah had the feeling she didn't know to what she was committed. Yet under her apprehension she knew she would go on with it, that she didn't want to resist it, that he was fascinating. But ... it could. be. playing with fire. Though perhaps that was rather absurd with a week-end spent mainly in the company of two middle-aged aunts, riding horses and milking cows.

But there would be that lonely ride home tonight, after the play.

Aunt Hattie and Aunt Kate were sitting in the big swing seat under a spreading ngaio tree when they got back, but Aunt Hattie got up as soon as she saw them coming, brushing the tiny daphne-like blossoms off her lap. .

'Tony, Flick was out with Peter, and he put up a rabbit and went to leap a fence - she got caught on the top strand of wire, caught in her flank. Peter said she was wonderful. She would have been much more tom, but she swung herself round and hung on to the wire with her teeth. He was with her in' a moment, fortunately, but it wasn't easy getting her free. He stitched her up and gave her an injection against infection, but she's pretty miserable.'

'Oh, a pity it had to happen just now. I'll go up, and see her. In the stables, is she?' He turned to Dinah. Like to come?'

Flick was looking very sorry for herself and licking resentfully at the stitches.

Peter was with her. He looked relieved when he saw them. 'It's only the second time I've done stitching, but she was very patient, and I think I've made not too bad a job of it.'

Dinah went down on her knees. 'A first-class job, I would say.'

Tony said to Peter, 'That's high praise. I told you who her father was.'

Then to the wounded Flick, 'Maybe you've learned your lesson about fences now, lass, but it's been the hard way.' He turned her over gently. 'Pity it extended so far under. But it will- be all healed up by the time she has her pups, I suppose.'

Dinah asked, 'When is she going to whelp?'

'Oh, not for nearly three weeks. Good job it was no nearer. Well, we'd better get on with the milking. Peter, will you get some overalls for Dinah?'

They finished the milking, Peter would attend to the separating. Dinner was ready when they got back to the house.

'Now, you two can change afterwards,' ordered Aunt Hattie. 'This chicken is done to a turn. We'll just have it in the kitchen. Have a quick wash and sit down. You stayed out far too long on the water.'

'I may be the new head of Bryn-Morgan's,' said Anthony sharing a towel with Dinah, 'but I surely do get bullied in my own kitchen.'

'Well, I like kitchens and I like informality,' said Dinah.

'Then in that case all I can say is you sure picked the wrong man to fall in love with when you picked Russell Milgrove,' said Anthony bluntly. 'I bet he never dribbled on his bib or burped after his bottle!'

Aunt Hattie's face was a study. 'Tony! You really do go too far. Just because you and Russell Milgrove were schoolboy rivals you don't need to go on like this. Though I don't-' She stopped dead, said, 'Do you like lots of stuffing Dinah dear?'

'Yes, thanks, I love it. But what were you going to say, Mrs. Hatfield?'

Anthony, passing his plate, said, 'She was probably going to be just as devastatingly candid as me. She was going to say "though I don't see what any girl could see in Russell Milgrove".'

Aunt Hattie and Dinah locked glances.

Dinah said, 'It's all right. I have to take it from him, he's -'

'She was interrupted. 'I'll say it for you, Dinah. "He's the man who holds my pay-packet in the hollow of his hand." Meaning she has to be all submission and can't answer back as she'd like to. As if any redhead ever behaved like that! Now, will you please be quiet. We can't start till I've said grace.'

When he had finished saying it he looked across the table at Dinah most severely. 'It's very irreverent to giggle when people are saying grace. What Megan's children would think I don't know. We're supposed to be examples to them.'

To his aunt he said, 'She persists in regarding me as a wolf and can't reconcile wolves with saying grace before meat.'

Conversation returned to normal.

Dinah took great pains over her toilet. This dress had cost the earth and was real extravagance since she had had so many new ones for the trip out. But it was worth it. It was gauzy and pure copper-coloured. It had a full, short skirt and a neckline that showed her apricot skin to perfection. A paua shell necklace linked with silver gleamed above it opalescent, and there were earrings to match, all bringing out the green of the eyes under the winged copper brows. There was a coat to go with it in a slightly heavier

material and her shoes and gloves matched perfectly.

She came up the step on to the bigger landing as Anthony , came out of his room. He stopped short when he saw her, made a soundless whistle with his lips, then stepped to her, both hands catching hers.

'Dinah darling, that's breathtaking. You look like a copper beech leaf. I'll be very proud to be your escort tonight. Let's make it a night to remember.' He sniffed. 'You smell good too. What is it? Something not too sophisticated ... Apple-blossom? No? White lilac ... oh, I hope it is. I'm not really as good at picking them as Cleo is.'

'You are this time. It's Duval's White Lilac. Cleo said it's just right for me.'

'Well, that's fine, because I didn't get you an orchid, I got you white lilac. They assured me they'd fix it so it wouldn't droop too soon. I hope they're right. It's in here. Come on in and I'll pin it on you.'

Dinah found her pulses were racing. It was his own bedroom, austere furnished. He left the door wide open.

He picked up a pair of scissors, slit the Cellophane, drew out the white and silver spray. She was acutely conscious of his fingers against her skin.

He stepped back, studied it, had another go, turned her round to face the mirror, regarded her reflection smilingly. Then suddenly his hands tightened on her shoulders, he swung her round) looked down on her, with something in his eyes she didn't quite fathom; she'd had no previous experience of anyone quite like Anthony Bryn-Morgan.

He said, with a twinkle, 'Under such circes kissing is quite inevitable, don't you think?' and bent his head, gathering her close.

He lifted his mouth from hers, but kept her in the circle of his arms, looking down on her, rather searchingly. Dinah dropped her eyes, confused, saw the faint line of a scar on his shaven lip, put her hand up to it without considering what she was doing, said rather unsteadily, 'Anthony, I'm sorry I said what I did about the moustache. Quite apart from the scar, you aren't in the least vain, whatever else you are.'

His eyes glinted down on her. 'Why didn't you stop at "vain"? Why add "whatever else you are"? It spoils it.'

She was confused again, said, 'I - I don't know. Anthony, let me go.'

'Well, I'd rather not. This is very pleasant. But I suppose we must. Anyway, the night isn't ended yet.'

Dinah wished her pulses would stop tingling. She was as fluttery as a young girl after her first kiss. That was ridiculous. If she faced up to things, it was merely the heady fascination of being made love to by a confirmed bachelor by one who said he was not a marrying man, and there was danger in letting one's feelings be roused.

Nevertheless, as she moved downstairs with him his hand cupping her elbow, she reflected that it was nice to be going out and to be comfortably sure that there wouldn't be a last minute telephone call to say something important had cropped up and Russell was sorry but they'd have to forgo their outing.

She glanced fleetingly at him and was suddenly aware that she too was proud to be seen with her companion. No, he wasn't really tall, or dark and handsome, but very much a man's man. And a woman's man, she finally admitted to herself.

The car was. opposite the loggia, sleek and shining. Anthony came round to open the door. As he opened it they heard it - a cross between a yowl and a moan. They both listened for the repeat sound, then, too experienced not to know, said in duet: 'Flick! She's starting!'

They turned and made their way up to the stables. She was in a smaller part, next to the main one. It was used mainly for storing hay. The stables were wired for electricity, and as it was full of shadows, Anthony turned the light on.

It was only too evident. At that moment they heard another car draw up outside. Peter's. He and his young wife came in.

Peter glanced apologetically at his wife, but said immediately, 'Well, it looks as if we don't go out tonight. Nancy, we're going to act midwives.'

Anthony shook his head. 'Oh no. It's not our wedding anniversary - we'll stay, won't we, Dinah?'

They argued, inevitably, but Anthony Bryn-Morgan won.

Peter and Nancy went out. Anthony cocked a rueful eye at Dinah in her finery. 'It looks as if your escorts are doomed to stand you up, Dinah. It's poetic justice ... serves me right for being so damned snooty! But I feel as flat as the devil. And I don't know how you feel. A party dress and no party!'

'Oh, rubbish. I'm not a child. Let's get out of our glad rags. There are other nights, and Flick needs us. She won't have the' easiest time. Delivering offspring is largely muscular, and her muscles must be all pulled, poor darling.'

'Dinah, you are a good sport. I'll stay here while you go up and get changed, then I'll change.'

Dinah could see he was worried about Flick, yet so sorry to spoil her evening. How glad she was he was so concerned for Flick; so many men were callous about animals.

When she came back she said, 'Your Aunt Hattie is fixing up a couple of eye-droppers for us, sterilizing them, so we can feed the puppies with some warm milk if Flick's too sick still to take much interest in them.'

Anthony said, 'Well, I sure picked the right week-end to bring my secretary down, didn't I? Though you ought to be feeling completely frustrated.'

'I'm not. This is different.'

His eyes came up to hers, he was bending over some bales of hay. 'Different from what, Dinah?'

She flushed, but answered frankly: 'From Russell's excuses. Oh, I'm not being mean to him, some of the reasons were quite valid, only he didn't ever sound as regretful as you ... that I should suffer disappointment. He seemed to take it for granted I wouldn't mind. I may be in love with him, but I'm not so besotted as not to realize I'm heading for trouble if I allow myself to be taken for granted. I can't take on where Mrs. Milgrove leaves off ... hopelessly spoiling him. It makes a man selfish.'

'You'll be very good for Russell. He's never had much of a chance to prove himself. He might have had his father lived longer. But he's been cushioned too much from the shocks of life by Mrs. Milgrove's feather-pillow bolstering. That's quite a fine way to go into marriage, Dinah, resolved not to just blindly adore, but to bring out the better qualities in a man, however latent. Though it won't be easy for you unless Russell takes some position away from Dunedin and lets you have a fair show.'

Dinah turned her head away so he should not see her expression. That was quite a nice speech, but it showed plainly, if ever anything did, that Anthony Bryn-Morgan's interest in this was purely passing, part of his innate kindness. Wanting to help a situation and - because of the type of man he was - enjoying a little harmless and pleasurable dalliance on the side. Harmless? Well, so far, and she, Dinah, would see to it that it kept that way. So why in the world, she asked herself impatiently, did she suddenly feel depressed? She mentally shook herself, said aloud, 'What are you doing, Anthony?'

'Making these bales into a sort of chair. We might as well be as comfortable as possible in our vigil. Hope it isn't too long.'

They didn't get a chance to try out the improvised seating. It became necessary to assist Flick.

Two hours later they had nine squeaking atoms. Anthony groaned.

'Dinah, what are you doing? You really don't think she can have any more? Flick, did you have to be so prolific? You've got more now than you've ever had! It really is overdoing things.'

'Don't get in such a flap, Anthony, we can manage.'

'It's the feeding of them I'm thinking of. She's pretty sick and exhausted now with that accident and this

on top of it. She isn't going to be able to suckle an ordinary litter, much less this crowd. Oh, help, here's another coming!

There were a round dozen. A record, for Flick.

Dinah fixed Flick up, Anthony attended to the puppies.

Dinah scrubbed up in the big basins of hot water the aunts had brought down, prepared an injection, gave it to Flick.

Flick was too sick to be much interested in the puppies.

She did essay a maternal lick in their direction, but it was too much for her. The puppies were already nosing in.

They looked at them. They were already drying out into their first fluffiness.

'Now,' asked Aunt Hattie briskly, 'are you coming up for coffee now all is safely over?'

'We'll take it in turns,' said Dinah. 'Anthony, you're more tired than I - you had last night up too. Up you go.'

'No. You've done most of the work.'

Aunt Hattie settled it by saying she'd bring a tray down.

The food revived them. There was a plate of hot savoury toast, covered, asparagus rolls, pikelets with jam and cream and a huge percolator of coffee.

The aunts said they would have theirs at the house and go to bed. No doubt Anthony and Dinah felt in duty bound to watch over the little family and keep feeding them, a job that was going to take time. They departed.

Dinah looked after them reflectively. Aunt Kate, of course, had no idea of Anthony Bryn-Morgan's reputation, but Mrs. Hatfield must know it. Yet she thought nothing of leaving them here, alone, on the bales of hay.

Presently all was quiet except for the odd snuffing and snorting of the puppies as they wriggled and moved in their sleep.

They talked quietly of all sorts of things, of her life in England, her father's work as head of the great veterinary college, of the small farm they had attached to it. Dinah felt warmed, comforted by the friendly interest. Russell had shown none. True, it was supposed to be part of the female technique to keep a man talking about himself, but it was nice, once in a while, to feel he was interested in you.

Anthony Bryn-Morgan wasn't sitting close to her, he was sitting at an angle. Possibly he liked looking at the person he was talking to. But she had to hand it to him he wasn't taking the slightest advantage of this situation. That was another chalk mark in his favour. That, -and his aunt's confidence in him.

Anthony looked around the cobwebby stable. 'Not the romantic setting I'd planned at all ... and yet the most wonderful story of all time began in a stable, didn't it, nearly two thousand years ago?'

He said it so naturally.

They didn't talk all the time. It was strangely restful here, lit by gone inadequate electric light, deep shadows in the corners, and outside, glimpsed through the window, the southern stars above old Tangaroa. The outcrop of the rock was a darker mass against the skyline. It was comforting as if he too kept vigil. Not only the god of the fish and the ocean but of dogs and puppies too.

Anthony yawned again. He had leaned his head back against the pile of square hay bales behind him. In the dimness Dinah smiled to herself. In another few moments her boss would be asleep.

He was.

When he was deeply off, Dinah rose, went across to the wall, lifted down a horse-blanket, spread it over him. He stirred, but didn't wake. Gently she eased the bales round a little so he was almost lying down. She took some loose hay, pushed it in the hollow of his back, under his outflung arm.

He deserved an hour or two of sleep.

It was after midnight when she heard the manager scar coming up the hill. She tiptoed to the door, looked out. They came to a stop and she went across. .

'What do you think? Twelve puppies. All pretty good, two a bit weaker. Flick's too sick to be bothered with them, but she's sleeping it off now. Anthony has gone fast asleep.'

Peter Strong got out of the car. 'I'll take over now. . I'll see Tony and then go up to the house and get changed. It'll mean feeding the puppies artificially quite frequently, won't it? How are you managing?'

Dinah told him. 'But I think Tony wants to see it out. He said you'd probably offer to do just that, but he wasn't going to let you. That-'

She stopped.

Peter grinned. 'That you know more about it than I do, is probably what he said.'

'No.' She couldn't have him thinking Tony wouldn't trust the puppies and Flick to him, so she said conscious of hot cheeks, though it was too dark to matter, He said. It was a poor way to celebrate a wedding anniversary by sitting up all night with a sick bitch.'

Nancy Strong burst out laughing. 'That sounds more like Tony! Let him do it, Peter. You know what

Tony is ... he's got a heart of butter. That's how people try to take advantage of him. Though I've no objection to doing it myself tonight. Can we come and look at the puppies?

'Yes, but tread quietly so's not to wake him. When he does I'll go up to the house for a couple of hours, then come down and relieve him.'

Nancy Strong slipped her hand into Dinah's arm and gave it a squeeze.

'I think Tony's got the right sort of girl for him' she said.

Dinah opened her lips to deny that, then closed them again. It wasn't the sort of thing one could explain.

After the Strongs had gone, Dinah fed the puppies again, and Silence settled more deeply again. If you could call it a Silence, punctuated as it was with the movements of horses not far away, somewhere a sheep coughing, a lamb baaing, an owl hunting in the hedge with its repeated cry of 'More pork, more pork,' and the faint, distant lap of waters on the shore.

She looked at her boss, sprawled out on the hay, his face wearing the defenceless look that slumber gives, sleeping deeply, relaxedly. This was his life, the farm. Yet he spent eight hours and more each day shut up in the city. Did it pretty well, too, something you could admire. Not out of gratitude to the people who had adopted him, but out of love.

Oil the other side of the ledger, a bad reputation with women. But couldn't it have been just a folly of youth? There were always two sides to such things. The girl might have been a poor type, even a gold-digger. They might both have been wretchedly unhappy had they married. Dinah perceived she was trying to make excuses for this contradictory boss of hers, and shied from it. There was danger in liking this man too much. What on earth was she thinking? She was only doing this to bring Russell to his senses. *Wasn't she?*

It was at least an hour later that she heard the footsteps.

They were tiptoeing. Someone who knew Anthony was asleep. It must be Peter, come to insist on relieving them. Dinah wouldn't be sorry, she was dead beat now. She had just started on another round

of feeding, sitting on a bale some distance from Anthony.

The door swung open and in came two people, one a balding, more than middle-aged man, the other a youngfaced, white-haired woman.

Bur ... but this was unbelievable. The Bryn-Morgan parents! They were supposed to be in the Cook Islands, or Fiji .

Mrs. Bryn-Morgan's eyes gleamed. She put a finger to her lips. Mr. Bryn-Morgan was grinning. Mrs. Bryn-Morgan bent over Anthony, said, 'Wake up, son, wake up. This is a poor sort of welcome home!'

He seemed to struggle up through fathoms of sleep. He rubbed his eyes, tried to focus them, rubbed again, sat bolt upright, said, 'Mum! Dad!' The next moment he was kissing his mother and reaching out a hand to his father.

'Where did you spring from? And at this time of night. I thought you weren't coming home till December.'

'We got homesick. We loved the Islands and the Islanders, but decided we could do it from here some time. Got a sudden yen for our family. We took the late plane down, and blest if Momona didn't close and they couldn't land. We had to go on to Invercargill.'

'Momona closed! But it's a peach of a night.'

'Not out on the Taieri, son. Thick mist from the river.'

'Thought we'd have to spend the night in Invercargill. They diverted us there, but they were sending up a bus, so we came on it and took a taxi all the way out from town.'

Dinah thought what lovely, impulsive people. It was good to retain a little of the warm-hearted impatience of youth into the sunset years. She separated the bottle and the puppy. 'What a greedy

monster, you'll go off pop if you have any more, Whiteynose.' She picked up another.

Anthony said severely, 'Dinah, you ought not to have let me sleep. What a girl you are! Mother, I bring her out for a festive week-end, had tickets for His Majesty's, she had a new frock and all she got was the job of staying home to deliver Flick's pups.'

Mr. Bryn-Morgan turned to Dinah. 'I wager you didn't mind, took it as it came.' He looked at his son, twinkled. 'I probably know her better than you.'

'I doubt that, Dad. I know her exceedingly well.'

Mrs. Bryn-Morgan beamed. 'This sounds positively ideal.'

Dinah looked horrified. 'He doesn't mean it that way, Mrs. Bryn-Morgan, believe me. He probably only means ... er-' She looked helplessly at Anthony.

He appeared to come to her rescue. 'I meant that we got on to the most intimate terms right away.'

Dinah groaned. 'Oh, Anthony! Mrs. Bryn-Morgan, he's just teasing. He-'

'I shall explain myself, Dinah darling. After all, who could do it better? Dad will imagine otherwise that we remained on an ordinary employer-secretary basis for weeks and weeks. We didn't. Dad, I bet you never had a secretary throw something at you at your very first interview!'

Dinah gave a cry. 'Anthony, you're outrageous! Mr. Bryn-Morgan, I did not! I only threatened to.'

Mr. Bryn-Morgan broke down into laughter unrestrained, his wife joined in.

Dinah regarded them with dismay. 'I don't know what to make of him sometimes. I don't know what

you'll be thinking. I - oh, how can I explain it?

Mrs. Bryn-Morgan put an arm round her. 'Dear, you don't need to. I've lived with Anthony for close on thirty years. He was a real pickle. A genius for getting into scrapes. Except for the last year or two when he's taken life much too seriously. We made up our minds you were just the sort of girl to take him out of himself, and so you have. He's back to his old self.'

Dinah felt more than ever dismayed. Anthony was observing her closely, smiling. 'Dinah, you'll choke that puppy in a moment. Give it space to breathe. It's no use trying to explain the situation. It's a crazy household ... take us as you find us and don't worry. Dad, does Aunt Hattie know you're here?'

'Yes, she explained all about everything. Good job Dinah was here to help you with Flick. Aunt Hattie is up in her dressing-gown rustling us up something to eat. Can't call it supper at this hour of the morning! Your aunt is helping her, Dinah. Now, what are you two going to do?'

'I'll tell you what ... we'll take these puppies up to the house. They can spend the night in my room. I'll feed them as they need it - I hope not too often. No, Dinah darling, you're not going to have them. I'll take Flick up in a box too, if she wakes and feels better she'll want the puppies. It's what I intended to do, anyway, only I fell asleep. Dad give me a hand with Flick and you and Mum can take the puppies, Dinah.'

What a fantastic night, thought Dinah, yawning, as she, followed. Imagine it happening in the Milgrove ménage! Mrs. Milgrove's journeys would be decorous, running schedule, not like the mad junketings of the Bryn-Morgans.

It was four before the household slept. Bryn-Morgan senior had said as they laughingly bade each other good night, 'What time is the church service, son? I can't work out which Sunday it is.'

'The Sunday we have it in the afternoon, praise be. We won't stir till about eleven. Aunt Hattie, you're not to get up early .. I'll bring everyone an early cup of tea. My little family will waken me, no doubt.'

As Dinah tumbled thankfully into bed she realized she had not enjoyed herself so much since she left Wales .

CHAPTER EIGHT

SHE wakened to find her employer padding in with a cup of tea, and a slice of thin bread-and-butter. 'It's nine o'clock. Your aunt awake yet?' He poked his head into Aunt Kate's room. 'Ah, good morning, Kate. How are you after that hectic night? Fresh as paint, I see. Here's your tea, but lie in bed and doze after that. Society hours for meals today; Peter is doing all the outside chores.'

Dinah sat up, pushed her tousled hair back, said, 'But what a frightful waste of a glorious morning. Isn't it a beauty? How are the puppies?'

'Oh, very lively. The last two are only a little less so now Poor Flick doesn't know what it was all about. She's never had an accouchement like this one, but she's in maternal ecstasy now. Dinah, put your slippers on, you'll get cold in bare feet.'

Dinah inspected them. 'Flick's getting her supply now ... we can put them to her, all right.' Her eyes strayed longingly to the view of the sea from his window.

'I get it. You want to ride, Di? Is that it?'

She shook her head. 'No, it would be mean to expect you. That was your second night of short rations of sleep.'

'What of it? Tell you what, let's sneak down and cook breakfast for the older folk and give it to them in bed, then we won't feel we're fading out on them and leaving them everything to do, and we'll go over the hill down to the inlet on the other side. And you can gaze out over the sea and think next stop South Pole.'

As they carried the first two trays up Anthony said, 'Remind me to ask Aunt Hattie about what time she wants the roast put in. We have midday dinner Sundays. There's a leg of lamb. It will save her getting up too soon.'

Dinah said, 'You sound so domesticated. What a pity you aren't a marrying man.'

'That's not a nice thing to say, Miss Pritchard. You really do hit below the belt at times. How you think these things up beats me.'

'I didn't think it up. You said it yourself.'

'I did? When?'

'When you said you didn't want a beautiful secretary. That they usually had designs on you. That you weren't a marrying man.'

'Good heavens girl, what a memory you've got! You oughtn't to remember what a man says in temper.'

'All right. If you promise not to go on casting up the things I said, the things I threatened to do.'

His eyes met hers. 'You mean you don't think those things about me any more?'

'Meaning I'm not in a bad temper all the time.'

'Cagey beggar.' He tapped on his parents' door. 'It's us. With breakfast. May we come in?'

'This is wonderful,' said Mrs. Bryn-Morgan. 'There's no place like home.' She picked up her grapefruit spoon. 'And we'll start the builders on the new house next week, Anthony.'

Her son said, 'Oh, Mother, no. hurry. Plenty of room here.'

She evaded his glance a little. 'Oh, I want to see it started.

Alun is very keen to get his things out of storage, aren't you, Alun?'

'Well, Dad could bring them here.'

'No, I don't want to cramp you.'

Anthony's mother caught Dinah's eye, smiled a little.

There was a meaning in it that she could not mistake. Oh dear! She couldn't blame her. When you arrive after midnight to find your son's secretary and aunt out for the weekend, it's only natural to leap to conclusions. Especially when it was a girl you had taken a fancy to yourself. Dinah didn't want any complications. Yet it warmed the heart after the chilly reception she had had from Mrs. Milgrove.

They took up the trays to the aunts, came down to eat their own breakfast.

Anthony switched on the oven. 'I'm to get that up to four fifty degrees, put plenty of fat in the roasting-pan, let it sizzle ten minutes with ... um ... bottom medium and top low ... and put the lid on, and turn top off and bottom low. How's that?'

'I can't fault you, you're dead right.'

He passed her marmalade. 'Dinah, you're the most fearless damsel I know.'

'Fearless? What do you mean? I haven't been going in for any feats of derring-do.'

'No, but you took that seat in the glaring, harsh light of morning, and you haven't got a bit of make-up

on, all you've done is brush your glorious hair. Some girls wouldn't risk it.'

She shrugged. 'I didn't study it out. Anyway, I thought I'd shower before getting into riding kit, and it would be a waste of time to do it twice.'

'Let's go one better and make it a bathe. Down at the inlet. It's on the other side. You brought your swimsuit, didn't you?'

They washed the dishes, put the meat in, and were away out on the horses in the glorious sunshine.

There was no one on the beach, not even a farmhouse to be seen, and before them stretched the Pacific, league upon league. Herein the rock-edged bay of the tiny inlet, the water was calmer.

'Natural bathing shed over there,' indicated Anthony. 'See ... round that arm of rock and into the cave. I'll go behind those pines. Race you in, Dinah.'

He beat her easily, and crowed. 'That was to be expected,' argued Dinah. 'Men's clothes are much simpler.' 'Ordinarily, yes, but you had slacks and a shirt same as me, and I bet you didn't have more than two things On underneath.'

Dinah went slightly pink. 'Isn't it a topsy-turvy world? Fancy bathing in November.'

'Keep away from that kelp over there. The rest of the bay is extremely safe. You can never get swept out to sea because of that natural bar over there, with the sea breaking on it. Race you to that rock.'

She pulled a face up at him, as, having reached it long before her, he bent to pull her up. 'Bent on showing your masculine superiority, aren't you?'

His eyes laughed into hers. 'Well, after last night, when I weakly went off to sleep and allowed you to do it all, I need to.'

They sat on the rock, dangling their feet in the water, the sun beating down on them.

'What's the sudden frown for, Dinah?'

She sighed. 'I was just thinking how hard it will be to get back on our normal footing tomorrow.'

'Our business footing,' he corrected her.

'What's the difference?'

'I'd like this to be the normal.'

She laughed. 'This is just a flash in the pan. To bring Russell to heel.' She wanted him to answer that, but he didn't.

He said, 'See ... a ship on the horizon. I wonder where she's making for.'

Dinah said, scooping up water with her toe, 'I mean I hope I don't find it hard to go back to "No, sir", and "Yes, Mr .. Anthony".'

'You won't. Something about the atmosphere of the shop makes one formal. Plenty of the girls are close friends but call each other Miss always in front of the customers. And Margot Evans never says "Forward, Mum", when she calls her mother forward to serve, but always "Mrs. Evans".'

There was one other thing. Dinah kept looking down into the rock-pool below as she said it. 'But I did wonder, Tony, that you made it quite so deliberately blatant in front of the staff the other night that you were taking me home. If you're as unguarded about this week-end it could cause talk.'

'That's exactly why, my dear girl: There isn't going to be anything clandestine about this.'

Dinah thought a shadow passed over the sun. The day suddenly seemed less bright. *This*. Then there must have been some truth in what Mrs. Milgrove had said. And yet ... She slipped off the rock.

'We mustn't stay here too long, it's hardly fair when your mother and father have just got back.'

Straight after lunch they went down to the little bay church. It had services only every other Sunday, run from Portobello, once at nine in the morning, once at two in the afternoon.

'We really are still members of Knox,' said Mr. Bryn-Morgan. 'My wife and I have been down here with Tony only a short time. We had a very good offer for our old home, and wanted to build a smaller one, so we moved out some time before the trip. But we always attend worship here when we're down for the week-end. The numbers are very small here, naturally. We'll go to Knox tonight. Will you and your niece come with us, Mrs. Livingstone?'

'We'd like to, very much. We're thinking of joining up at Knox too.'

It was a plain wooden building, but beautifully appointed within, the service was simple, the people reverent, and, afterwards, friendly.

Aunt Kate loved it, Dinah could see. She watched her eyeing the outline of the little church, the bluegums above it, the sea beyond, the curve of the hill and the shore and guessed a picture was forming an image in Aunt Kate's mind.

They had a light tea early. 'Knox fills up soon, Dinah, as you've probably noticed. It's the biggest Presbyterian congregation in New Zealand, of course, though it thins out a bit after Varsity doses down. There's a big student membership. And, Di, if we have to go well down the aisle watch those high heels ... they have gratings. Last time I was on the door, ushering the count of heels caught was five. I was hissing at them in the end, "Watch your step, girls".'

Last time he was ushering! That meant taking up the collection too ... so he was an active member of the

church not just a pew-sitter. So evidently the church and his minister did not look askance at him. Oh well, the church was for publicans and sinners, wasn't it? Dinah wished Mrs. Milgrove had never told her that particular bit of gossip.

The service, as usual, was vital and compelling, but the text seemed to have a special message for Dinah. It was from Philippians and made her, literally, sit up. 'He made Himself of no reputation.'

'So many people,' said the preacher, 'confuse reputation with character. They can be two entirely different things. His mud-slinging enemies hoped to harm Jesus by calling Him the friend of publicans and sinners. It was a piece of malicious slander then, intended to besmirch Him, to discredit Him. Now, we think of it as an attribute to His character, something that has comforted countless thousands who otherwise might have deemed themselves outside a Saviour's love. Quite a number of people have doubtful reputations, some deservedly, some not ... but it is character that counts.'

Anthony said to her, in the crowded aisle, coming out, 'Well, it was a good listening crowd tonight, but if all listeners had been as completely enrapt as you, Dinah, there wouldn't have been a single sound. You were scarcely breathing.'

She smiled. 'Yes, that's true.' She didn't want to talk about it, not even to him, even though she knew by now that she could share thoughts and silences equally well with him. She felt she had been led here tonight. She didn't want the significance of it to escape her, to be overlaid by small talk, trivialities.

They shook hands with both ministers, Anthony made Dinah and her aunt known to them, Mr. and Mrs. Bryn-Morgan were welcomed back, then they moved down the steep steps, Anthony's hand beneath her elbow.

Across the heads below them, Dinah's eyes met two pairs of eyes, Russell's and Mrs. Milgrove's.

She immediately felt guilty, conscious of censure. She kept her colour down by a determined effort, involuntarily squeezed Anthony's fingers against her ribs in an instinctive gesture of warning. Why, she did not know. His fingers tightened on her arm as he answered the pressure.

He turned to his mother and father behind them, said, 'Mrs. Milgrove and Russell are down here, we'd better speak to them.' Greetings over, Russell said to Dinah, 'I was quite surprised to see you walk in. Cannington left earlier than we expected, so I rang you, but couldn't get you. I didn't realize the

Bryn-Morgans were coming back so soon. Did they come and take you and your aunt out for a drive?

Dinah decided on absolute candour. 'Oh no. They didn't get back till the early hours of the morning. Quite unexpectedly. Aunt Kate and I were spending the week-end at Tangaroa with Tony and his aunt. Isn't it a delightful spot?'

She could have shrieked at the look on both faces.

Russell said in a low tone, as the others talked, 'Well, you didn't say. Why didn't you tell me?'

'I didn't see you after Anthony asked me. If you'd called for me Friday night, I would have, of course, but you were meeting this friend. I didn't want to butt in on your time with him, of course, by ringing next morning. Especially as your mother preferred me to remain in obscurity.'

Russell said, ignoring that, 'Well, we'll run you home now. The Bryn-Morgans have a long way to go.'

'They don't seem to worry. Mrs. Bryn-Morgan wants to see Aunt Kate's studio, so they're having coffee with us. I'll probably see you next week, Russell. Give me a ring if you want to.'

They moved off. They were parked in London Street. As they moved off Mrs. Bryn-Morgan said, not having heard the conversation between Russell and Dinah, 'Why did we have to make a point of speaking to them, Tony? You know I've never liked her.'

Anthony's glance flickered to Dinah, sitting between him and Aunt Hattie as he drove.

'Oh, Dinah met him in England. You remember, Mother, he was there earlier this year.'

'Well, fancy that now. It's a wonder his mother didn't go with him. He's usually tied to her apron strings. A most unpleasant woman. First time I ever met her was when she arrived at our place to complain about Tony. He'd pushed her precious Russell into a frog-pond. In his new suit! I tried to be fair, as I thought it probably would be Tony's fault, he was so pugnacious as a youngster, but the trouble was I

giggled in the middle of saying I was sorry. Stupid woman never forgave me. Then she said the unforgivable ... said what could one expect of an adopted child!

There was a deep-throated chuckle from Alun Bryn-Morgan. 'And then, of course, the fat was really in the fire. A tigress defending its young had nothing on Mother! She went in boots and all, no holds barred!'

Anthony's laugh held real merriment. 'Dad, you've got your metaphors mixed with a vengeance!'

Dinah was amazed at the indignation that possessed her ... over something that must have happened a quarter of a century ago! But beneath it all she was conscious of something else too. These Bryn-Morgans were completely and utterly frank. They mentioned the adoption absolutely without embarrassment. Dinah liked that.

When they were going up the steps to the Harcourt Street house, Anthony and Dinah brought up the rear. Anthony said in a low tone, 'Dinah, they don't yet realize the exact relationship between you and Russell - another awkward angle of this understanding that exists. I'll tip them off, but I can't at the moment. Just disregard any clangers they drop tonight. But we'll keep them off the subject as much as we can. And Russell, in all fairness, isn't as objectionable as his mama. In many ways one feels darned sorry for him - being brought up by an arrant snob - it's over to you, presumably, to see he gets a better deal in later life.'

Again depression came bearing upon Dinah. Quite a remarkable speech, kindly, tolerant but - oh, why was there a 'but' in her mind? Oughtn't she to be glad that Anthony Bryn-Morgan thought she could do a lot for Russell?

She lost sight of her moods in the hour that followed.

Aunt Kate bloomed. Dinah was glad to see it, for the frosty reception they had received from Mrs. Milgrove had dimmed her pleasure in this new young country. It was good to see her expanding under the warmth and kinship of the Bryn-Morgans. Wealth certainly hadn't spoiled them.

'The children will make the supper,' said Aunt Kate happily, 'while we look around the studio.'

The 'children' laughed and went out to inspect the larder.

They sat around the fire eating a huge stack of savoury toast, and drinking cup after cup of coffee.

Anthony said, 'Come on out on the patio, Dinah, to see the moon over the harbour. Otago moons are really something.'

They went out into the scented night, watched indulgently by their elders. In the crevices of the crazy paving the previous owners had inserted alyssum and mignonette and some kind of flowering mint. Their feet crushed it and the perfume rose to them, heady and sweet.

Dinah put a hand on one of the rose-pillars, looked down at the dark harbour waters, the lighted shipping, the illuminated masts of the radio transmitters on the Peninsula, turned her head to sweep the sky above Mount Cargill and Mount Flagstaff, keeping watch and ward above the city.

'There isn't a moon!' she said accusingly.

He laughed, threw away his cigarette, said, 'I think everyone but you knew there wasn't, Dinah darling, but it always sounds a good excuse for a chap to get a girl to himself, don't you think?'

He turned her slowly round, kissed her lingeringly, thoroughly. Dinah's thoughts were chaotic. Wasn't he the strangest mixture?

Last night he had all the opportunity in the world, yet there in the stable he didn't attempt to kiss me, even to hold my hand ... or when we were away out by ourselves, on that rock in the middle of the bay. Or even this morning, sitting in our dressing-gowns over the kitchen table.

But here with her family and his within reach, he was indulging in a little light love-making. What meant ... now, what did it mean? It could mean, that if she wanted to, she could break away.

She didn't want to.

Down came the shutter in her mind on the thought. It didn't bear a close analysis. But if those were Anthony's reasons, then he had a delicacy of feeling that was very fine. Probably, even if he didn't know his parentage, it was inherited from a line of admirable forebears and emphasized by those two warm-hearted people in there, the Bryn-Morgans. How did that tie up with his treatment of that other secretary?

She became aware that though he had lifted his head, he still held her in a light embrace, and was looking down into her face. His tone held an undercurrent of laughter. 'Dinah, you've gone into a day-dream! Well, I'm blest ... what a way to treat a kiss! I'm not used to this!' He gave her a little shake. 'You ought to be more aware of me than that.'

She laughed. Suddenly it was delicious fun. 'You might

be surprised at what I was thinking.' .

'Well, try me. Tell me.'

No, she couldn't. She fell back on what she had first thought, 'All right ... I was thinking it really is nicer without the moustache!'

He promptly kissed her again. 'Ah, that sounds more like the girl I first took you for. With a bit of feeling and warmth. Not the sedate creature you're trying to turn yourself into for Russell.'

Russell. All roads lead to Rome .

Dinah had a little shake in her voice. 'Tony, I think we ought to go in.'

She didn't sleep. She could have, had she allowed herself to drift off to sleep warm and lapped about by the remembrance, the too-vivid remembrance of Anthony Bryn-Morgan's arms about her, his compelling

lips on hers seeking response and ... she had to admit ... finding it. She was getting in too deep, and it was only intended to be a game.

And she kept wondering what he had meant, how much he had meant by: 'I'm not used to this.' Maybe a practised hand. How stupid ... of course he wouldn't have got to twenty-nine without having taken plenty of girls out, but ... oh, the talk, the gossip. Could it mean that he knew so well how to play a waiting game?

Everything in her cried out against that. She didn't want to think those things about him. No, there must be another reason why had entered into this pretence with her. Oh, if only she could have come straight home, alone, after that sermon, retained for a little longer the sense of a fingerpest pointing her to truth. To the thing she hoped was truth ... that Anthony Bryn-Morgan had only a poor reputation, not a poor character.

Russell rang up during business hours the next day. 'Dinah, how about us going to "Love in a Mist" on Thursday night? I know you like plays best of all.'

'How very nice of you.' Dinah hid an inward smile. Were all men the same? Did they value you the more if someone else was, presumably, in the running? 'But not to that particular play. Tony is taking me on Wednesday night to that.' Her eyes gleamed with mischief as they met Anthony's. 'It will have to be a film, Russell.'

Dunedin was small enough as a city not often to have two plays running at a time.

They made the arrangements. Dinah could sense Russell's very understandable annoyance even over the wire, but he wouldn't say anything because he'd wonder if Anthony was within earshot.

Dinah couldn't help it, she added, 'And, Russell, I've never used any employer's phone like this for private calls. I really don't approve. There's a strict rule here, naturally, with so large a staff, that there are no private calls. I don't feel the big chief's secretary should so blatantly disregard it, so only ring me at home from now, would you?'

Her employer's hand came over her shoulder, took the phone from her. 'Oh, Russell, Bryn-Morgan here. I just overheard that last remark of Miss Pritchard's. It was her idea, not mine. I don't feel the dice should be loaded too heavily against you. I'd have an unfair advantage against you that way. Please feel

free to ring her whenever you wish ... no, no trouble at all, you're very welcome. Gooddbye for now.'

Dinah was speechless.

Aunt Kate invited Anthony to have dinner with them on the Wednesday night. 'Much too far for you to go home to the Bay, and I'd love to have you.'

He arrived with long-stemmed dark red roses for Aunt Kate, dewy and sweet from the florist's, and another sprig of white lilac for Dinah.

This time he took her into their newly furnished lounge to pin it on. He hesitated, started to say something, changed it to something else.

Dinah was amazed. Anthony Bryn-Morgan wasn't the hesitating sort. He was more likely to blunder in, even if he made the occasional mistake. Redheads were like that.

Finally he put his hand in his pocket, took out a tissue wrapped parcel, said in a tone she felt to be deliberately casual, 'I saw this when I was passing the counter today, Dinah. I felt it would go perfectly with your dress. It has earrings to match. The paua set is lovely, but this would be perfect. Would you accept it from me?'

He undid it, took her palm, slid something into it.

Her other hand came up to hold it out - a necklace of glittering topaz-coloured stones, threaded on a slender golden chain. It swung from her fingers, the light catching it, matching the russet of her hair, her frock. She held the earrings in her other hand.

'Tony, no. You can put it back into stock; You're doing this for me out of the goodness of your heart - I mean appearing to rush me to spur Russell on. I don't want any gifts, though. It's not as if-' She stopped.

'Not as if what, Dinah?' He seemed unwontedly serious.

She had so nearly said, 'Not as if you really cared.'

She shook her head. 'Best to have second thoughts sometimes and restrain rash speech. Sorry, Anthony, I won't accept it. That would put me on the level of a good-time girl.'

She was amazed at his reaction. She saw the colour of temper rise up from his collar. He turned swiftly away, but not before she had seen something else ... temper and resentment give place to a sudden, desolated look. Something she hadn't associated with the assured Anthony Bryn-Morgan.

'All right, Dinah,' he said quietly. 'I understand. What it is to have a reputation like mine!'

There was stark bitterness in his tone. He put his hand on the mantelpiece, stared down at the empty grate.

Dinah was appalled. She acted quickly, stepped up behind him, took his elbows, swung him round.

Said beseechingly, 'Tony ... I didn't mean *that*. You must believe it. I hadn't given that a thought. Please believe me. It was just that in one position I worked with a couple of girls who were all for getting what they could out of their casual escorts. I despised them for it, thought it was . like putting a price on their company. Please believe that's all I meant. I couldn't bear you to think I meant the other thing. I'll put it in plain language. I didn't mean I thought you were giving it to me as an earnest for favours anticipated.'

Her colour was high, but her eyes held his, and suddenly, more eloquent by far than words, her eyes filled with tears.

He laughed then, caught her hands, said, 'Oh, Di! Forgive me for being such a churl. It's only that the shadow of that always goes with me. It hurt Mum and Dad terribly; People said, what can be expected? Bad blood in the boy. Always a risk, adoption.'

There was compassion and indignation and something else he could not analyse in the hazel-green eyes

just below his. Her fingers were forcing his open, prying out the necklace. 'I'll take it, Tony, I'll always treasure it. Please?'

'Yes, and in a moment I'll put it on you, but first ... ' He kissed her. There wasn't any passion in that kiss. Maybe there was gratitude in it. Dinah didn't know, but she did realize that it had some pure, spiritual quality she had never before experienced.

Anthony put the earrings into her hand so he could cope with the necklace. He fastened it about her throat, admired it, standing at the back of her as she looked at herself in the gold-framed mirror on the wall. She put the earrings on herself, held out a hand to him, said, 'Come and show Aunt Kate.'

He pulled her back. 'What if your aunt objects? What if she thinks you shouldn't have accepted them?'

Dinah said sturdily, 'She may, of course, but I'll keep them just the same. She doesn't always approve of everything I do - but mostly she allows me to make my own decisions.'

Anthony said slowly, 'She'd never have had much trouble bringing you up, I imagine.'

They exchanged a serious glance. 'Tony, that's a very nice compliment, but oh, so undeserved! Poor Aunt Kate. She was the only odd one in a family of redheads as a child ... Kate the Peacemaker, they used to call her ... and then she got the job of bringing two more up, David and me.'

They need not have worried. Aunt Kate beamed, 'Nothing could be more perfect with Dinah's dress than that, Anthony.'

He said, 'Oh, I almost forgot ... how could I? Mother rang Megan at Lake Hayes today. She's dying to see her, of course' and won't wait any longer than she has to. So we're all going to the Stables this week-end. The parents want you and Di to come too. How about it? It means we see almost all Central Otago on the way. Central finishes in the mountains, you know. We can go to Queenstown on Lake Wakaatipu for a drive on the Sunday to let you see the lot.'

Naturally Aunt Kate demurred ... good manners made it essential she should say, 'But your sister will want your mother and father to herself. She won't want a pair of perfect strangers tacked on - none of

you will.'

The sandy brows lifted. 'Are we strangers? - oh, Katie darling, that's the most absurd statement of all time!'

Aunt Kate shrugged her shoulders and spread her hands out in a gesture of helplessness. 'These men who've kissed the Blarney Stone!'

'Anyway, Kate, it will give Megan and the parents a fair go ... we could take the kids off her hands. It will be an early start, I'm afraid, it's not far off a hundred and eighty miles.'

'Then you and your aunt and parents must spend the night here. We got the spare-room furniture today plus a properly sprung divan for the sun-room. I'll give you a camp-bed in the lounge. Then we can get away really promptly.'

That night, Dinah, reliving the delightful hours of entertainment before she drifted off to contented sleep, found her thoughts returning to the scene in the lounge.

He hadn't denied or explained anything. Perhaps she ought to make up her mind that a man could have a folly in his youth, and that it mustn't be held against him for ever. These things did happen, and life had to go on. Anyway, why should it matter *to her*? She was going to marry Russell ... She put her hand up under her pillow and her fingers fastened on the topaz necklace. She had put it there without thinking. She must remove it in the morning lest Aunt Kate see it and drop to all sorts of erroneous conclusions. And it wasn't like that at all. It was just comforting to feel it there to know that she had successfully removed the sting her ill-chosen words had administered. Of course. That was all there was to it. Nobody liked to think they had wounded another person's feelings ...

CHAPTER NINE

DINAR was expecting Mrs. Milgrove to be deeply distressed about her being with the Bryn-Morgans for the week-end. In fact she wondered if Mrs. Milgrove might use it as a weapon to convince Russell that he hadn't made a wise choice in a future life-partner. Oh, why couldn't it have been the other way round? That Mrs. Bryn-Morgan could have been her future mother-in-law?

But apparently she had done Mrs. Milgrove an injustice.

She had a ring from her.

'I'd like you to come to dinner on Thursday night before going to the film with Russell. You could bring your dress with you, couldn't you? I could always press it for you if need be. I should so enjoy it if you could.'

Dinah felt almost overcome. Could this be Mrs. Milgrove? But she ought not to try to analyse it but just take it as an example of what Aunt Kate had so sensibly said, that even antagonistic-to-begin-with mothers-in-law come round in the end, accept the fact that life must go on, that a mother must give place to a wife. She must try to meet Mrs. Milgrove half-way.

At lunch-time Aunt Kate, watching Dinah pack her things into a small case, said, 'Aren't you wearing the copper-coloured dress? It's so sweet with the matching coat. I've never seen you so lovely.'

'No. This green lace will do. The velvet coat that goes with this is warmer.'

'Warmer! But it's almost a heatwave ... much hotter than yesterday, and you wore the other then.'

Dinah snapped the lock shut, twinkled, 'Well, let's say I' in the mood for this today. Velvet and lace suits the Milgrove menage more, don't you think? Discreet, in good taste. Not so flamboyant as the copper.'

'Flamboyant! How ridiculous. It's a honey. But I see what you mean. Oh, Di, I can't see you settling down once you get married and wearing nothing but pastels. As an accompaniment to wigs and gowns.'

'You and Anthony Bryn-Morgan have exactly the same way of expressing yourselves,' said Dinah kissing her aunt good-bye. 'Well, see you later.'

'You'll see me tomorrow morning,' said her aunt firmly. Too late for me. I'll leave a Thermos and sandwiches out.'

'Oh, don't bother. There's nothing of the sweet sorrow of parting about the way Russell and I say goodnight, pet. His mama is always waiting.'

Aunt Kate said nothing. She stood on the patio watched Dinah run blithely down the steps, cross the road to the children's swings and begin to take the steps that led to the bush.

Well, the child didn't have so much dream-dust in her eyes now ... she was looking at Russell in an unblinkered way, but where would it end? She was slightly disenchanted yes, but what decision would she finally come to? Young ones had to make their own mistakes, even though their elders longed to protect them, but marriage was so irrevocable. Dinah had been so sure she had met her ideal when she found Russell. A lot of it could have been the charm of faraway places, the romance of marrying someone who lived at the other side of the world, in a less crowded country of great opportunity, and Aunt Kate had to admit that in Wales Russell had appeared to better advantage.

Maybe, if the marriage did eventuate, the young couple should go up to the North Island, find their own feet their own world, unhampered by either mothers or aunts. That could be a solution.

Yet. Aunt Kate went in to tackle a picture with a great weight of depression on her heart.

Mrs. Milgrove was all that was affable and as bland as cream. Dinah ought to have felt relaxed, but didn't. It was like stroking a kitten, knowing that any moment it might dig its claws into your knees. But she responded in a lightly cordial way that made Russell look on her in evident approval. A man shouldn't feel tension between his mother and his beloved. Dinah set herself out to make the hour as pleasant as possible.

Mrs. Milgrove actually let her help with the dishes. Russell busied himself with some work he had brought home.

As they finished, Mrs. Milgrove said, 'Dinah dear, I wonder if you would allow me to give you a little advice? One hesitates to offer it to the young, but I feel I should.' Quite nicely said, though not particularly natural-sounding. Still, it was always hard to say such things.

Dinah said encouragingly, 'Yes, of course. What is it, Mrs. Milgrove?'

'I don't think you've picked a very good time, dear, to become quite so excessively friendly with your employer and his family.'

She paused. Dinah said yes encouragingly then, when Mrs. Milgrove didn't appear to know quite how to go on, filled in by saying, 'Can one time these things? I mean is friendship a thing to be analysed as advantageous? Doesn't it just happen?'

'Well, if we were speaking of friendship between woman and woman, yes. Or between man and man. But between a girl and a man, especially a man like Anthony Bryn-Morgan, no.'

Dinah warned herself not to lose her temper. She said evenly, 'If you're going to say anything about his reputation, I should advise you not to, Mrs. Milgrove. My father always told me to make up my own mind about people. Not even to rely on first impressions. To keep an open mind. And I believe in loyalty to an employer.'

Mrs. Milgrove sighed. 'I believe in loyalty where there is something admirable to be loyal to, but I wasn't meaning that really. About the timing ... I told you Jenny was in town, didn't I? I was rather perturbed that you were not available to Russell last night. He seemed restless. Finally he phoned someone and went out; he didn't, as usual, say where, or whom he was meeting. But when he came home said he'd met Jenny in a coffee-bar. They must have had a very long session together. I felt I should warn you. I've never had anything like this to cope with before. Russell has always been so amenable. I felt he might have done it in a fit of pique.'

Dinah considered it quietly, which probably impressed Mrs. Milgrove. Then she said slowly, 'They might have met by accident. He may not have rung her up, and he did tell you, afterwards. I don't consider I can ask him about it. After all, I was out with Anthony Bryn-Morgan. I feel this business about a six months' trial has been very much for the best. We must know our own minds. I don't think it means a thing, his being out with Jenny. They don't have to cut each other just because they broke their engagement.'

'I don't think it was as harmless as that ... so much on the surface. I'm sure he rang her to meet him. I couldn't get anything out of him no matter how I tried. I asked all the usual questions, how she was

looking, how her people were, how long she was going to be in Dunedin, but it was no use. And he has always been so open.'

Dinah said, slowly, because suddenly she was exceedingly sorry for Mrs. Milgrove ... possessiveness never paid off, in the end you always lost the lot, instead of being content with some, I think there are some things a man doesn't want to share, Mrs. Milgrove. He needs some privacy, just as in adolescence he so badly needs a room all his own. I think in every life there are some things one doesn't share with anyone ... certain hopes and dreams, despairs, a consciousness somewhere of inadequacy. I don't think you need to worry about what took place between Russell and Jenny. They may have just been winding things up in a more satisfactory way than they did when they broke it off ... that could have happened in a time of temper. Or they may just have been agreeing to be friends.'

Mrs. Milgrove said, with a rare flash of insight 'You ought to be jealous.'

With a shock Dinah realized that was true but she said 'Well, you see we put this on such a common-sense basis - a sort of blueprint for love, six months to make up our minds - so I think it would be silly to pretend a grand passion now. I think we'll be able to work things out on the same basis, calmly and reasonably.'

Even as she said it she wondered at herself. Could this be Dinah Pritchard? And why wasn't she glad that suddenly, surprisingly, Mrs. Milgrove seemed to want her to make sure of Russell?

She took Mrs. Milgrove's hands in hers. 'It will work out all right. Whichever way it goes. Russell *must* marry the one he really loves. And I wouldn't be content with second-best.'

Mrs. Milgrove said, 'Why are you so calm about it? Few girls would see it so dispassionately ... ah, I have it. My dear, Anthony Bryn-Morgan may seem a better catch, but he's only a draper when all is said and done, not a professional man with a brilliant future. You mustn't delude yourself into thinking that these attentions he is paying you are anything more than his usual pattern of behaviour.'

Dinah held up her hand. 'If you're meaning that old scandal you can stop discussing it right now. I refuse to-'

Mrs. Milgrove looked at her, a cold fish look in her eye as she interrupted. 'I didn't mean that. I meant that ever since they were in the primer classes together, Anthony Bryn-Morgan has always tried to wrest

from Russell that which he most wanted! Even if he didn't want it himself. Special prizes for prowess in games. For essays, He was only captain of the school because Russell was away with illness that year. He never wants anything till he knows Russell does. A senseless, jealous rivalry. I could wager he never as much as thought of taking you out till he knew Russell was interested in you. And once he breaks this up he'll drop you.'

Dinah pulled herself together. 'Mrs. Milgrove, I can't quite take all this in yet. You made me far from welcome when I first came, now you're afraid of Jenny coming back into your son's life. So you're making a fuss of me. You want me to hang on to Russell. But please don't bring my employer into this.' She began to walk out of the kitchen.

Mrs. Milgrove said quickly, 'Dinah, don't say anything to Russell, will you?'

Dinah turned. 'No. Between the two of us I think Russell has rather a thin time.'

It was a good job the film was so good. It kept Dinah's mind from going round and round the problem. Kept the moment at bay when she must take it out and examine it.

As they came up the steps of the leg-in section to the patio, Dinah said, 'Well, Russell, I won't ask you in. It isn't fair to keep your mother up, she was looking rather tired tonight, I thought.'

He looked at her keenly. 'I've an idea you rather resented her waiting at first ... yet you said that quite nicely Dinah.'

She said lightly, 'Oh, maybe I'm mellowing. And perhaps your mother is too. Or else I'm not as romantic as once I was. It will be much less wearing for you ... if we get married ... to have a more sensible wife, a less demanding one.'

He swung her round to face him, rather more violently than was usual with Russell. 'Hey, what's this? Doesn't sound like you at all. Are you annoyed about something?'

Well, at least he cares now, thought Dinah, with true feminine satisfaction. A little while ago he wouldn't have noticed. Or if he had, he would have put it down to temperament.

She said slowly, with a faint note of discovery in her tone, 'No, I'm not annoyed, strangely enough. I find I don't just care very much. Maybe I was living in an unreal world before. One can't live on the heights all the time, the atmosphere's bit too rarefied.'

Russell had a tinge of impatient laughter in his tone. 'I've no idea what you're talking about. And I am coming in for supper. Mother told me she'd go to bed, not wait up tonight. She must be tired, as you noticed.'

No, not tired, only suddenly worried, but she'd better say nothing.

All right, Aunt Kate did say she'd leave something out (in case. But I'm warning you, Russ, I'm going to tip you out soon after, my lad. I was very late last night.'

Not a tactful remark.

Nevertheless Russell set himself out to be most charming.

After supper he said, smiling, 'This is ridiculous, to have the coffee-table between us. What's wrong with the couch in the window?'

He bent over her to pull her to her feet. She stood up. 'But I meant what I said, Russell. I'm nearly dead on my feet, Tomorrow is late shopping night, a long day at Bryn-Morgan's, and Aunt Kate and I have a fair bit to do tomorrow morning with a big week-end ahead.'

'A big week-end? How? I thought we might just-'

'We're going up to Lake Hayes with the Bryn-Morgans. They're all staying here tomorrow night. I have to help Aunt Kate put up extra beds. I've been so longing to see the lakes. I've been no further than Lawrence.'

Russell's voice sharpened. 'Dinah, I've been too busy-'

'I know. You always will be, Russell. Too busy for me. Not that I'd have minded that if you'd really been sorry to disappoint me so often. But you were just too complacently sure I would fit, without protest, into your arrangements. I've never been unreasonable, only it did something to me. Tell me, did you used to stand Jenny up the way you did me? Was that why the engagement was broken? Did she read the signs and wonder how she could stand your selfishness, year in, year out?'

She held her breath. That gave him a chance to tell her about Jenny. He didn't take it.

'Oh, for heaven's sake, Dinah, that's in the past.'

But was it?

He took a stride or two about the room. The fact that he was angry pleased Dinah; it was better than being coldblooded.

'Dinah, I don't understand you just now. What's come over you? Surely you haven't fallen for that bounder Anthony Bryn-Morgan? Girls do. But he's no good to you. Can't you realize that he's only-'

Dinah held up her hand. 'You don't need to say it, Russell. Your mother has said it for you. Can't I realize he's only making passes at me because he wants to score off you? That's what you were going to say, isn't it? That he always has. Between you, you and your mother, you're undermining my self-confidence. Or should be! But I'm hanged if I'll let you! I'm tied to nothing. Just having an understanding is wonderful, simply wonderful. If we'd been engaged you could have put your foot down. Your mother doesn't really like me, only she's so eaten up with jealousy and possessiveness that she'd rather you married me than Jenny. Because she thinks you love Jenny more. Because she wouldn't need to be quite so jealous of me.'

Surprisingly, Russell chuckled. 'Oh, Dinah, that's the first natural thing you've said tonight! You're jealous of Jenny. All right, I can understand that. Listen, my sweet-'

'No. *You listen tome* . You needn't feel proud and vain because two women are fighting over you. I ought to be jealous and I'm not. Your mother pointed that out. It worried her. And it worries me. I came fourteen thousand miles after you, and I'm not jealous about you! Please go home now, and don't attempt to see me till after this wee-kend. I know Anthony Bryn-Morgan doesn't mean a thing. He's doing this out of devilment, I agree. But the Bryn-Morgans are pets, and Aunt Kate just loves them, and I'm tagging along and seeing a bit of New Zealand while so doing. I like New Zealand scenery much much better than I like New Zealand men. *Any of them*. Good night.'

Russell shrugged, went quietly out of the house. Aunt Kate was sitting up in bed, in the darkness.

'I just hope,' she said to herself, 'that that may be the end of a stuffed shirt!' And lay down again. Better to wait till told than force a confidence. After all, being the only mousey one in a red-headed family of two generations at least taught you patience.

But Dinah wasn't thinking of the strained relationship with Russell, she was thinking of only one thing ... Anthony Bryn-Morgan's true reason for paying court to her ...

It was almost unbelievable that he should be so sublimely unaware. He came in next morning later than usual, said crisply, 'I took our gear up to your aunt's place, Miss Pritchard. Mother and Father are coming in by bus at lunchtime. Their new car hasn't arrived yet. My word, it looks like being the most glorious week-end. Weather is perfect and the forecast good. Central really shimmers this weather, though it may be too hot driving. What say we get away by seven? Could we manage it? Pack all we can tonight and get up early?'

'I suppose so,' said Dinah, trying to sound enthusiastic.

She certainly was having short rations of sleep this week. The joy in the week-end had departed for her anyhow.

The busy hours of the long shopping day and the relationship of Miss Pritchard and Mr. Anthony descended upon them. It was good to step out of the staff entrance at nine fifteen into the cooler night air and drive off.

'I'd like to shake off the shop atmosphere before going to your place, Dinah. I told them we might be

later. Let's go up Opoho and take Signal Hill Road to the Centennial Lookout."

They left the suburb of Opoho behind and climbed the hill till the last straggle of new houses was left behind and only gorse and farmland surrounded them.

In the friendly darkness they walked towards the great memorial to the pioneers that overlooked the city they had built a hundred-odd years ago, in a time when bush mid crowded right to the water's edge. A cool breeze fanned Dinah's temples. They came to the parapet, looked over the lighted city below, sprawled on its seven hills.

A different view of the harbour this, from home, but still one could see the cars purring round the Bay road to Tanngaroa where she had known such delight only last week-end. She knew the reason for it all now. Knew Mrs. -Milgrove had been only too right when she had cried, 'You ought to be jealous.' You didn't know jealousy where your heart was not involved.

Russell didn't matter any more. Only this man beside her did - broad virile sandy-haired, dynamic. And kind. Only in this case it didn't seem to be kindness that had prompted him, after all, but an ingrained habit of going one better than Russell Milgrove. She said suddenly: 'Anthony, did you ever know Jenny? The girl Russell used to be engaged to?'

'Oh, I met her once - an introduction, no more. I can't remember what she looked like, if you're being curious.'

' You never took her out?'

'No. I said just an introduction. Why in the world would I want to take her out?'

'Oh, I don't know. I just wondered.'

He turned and looked at her. 'Dinah darling, you're very tired, aren't you? You're usually so vital, so full of life. You look quite pale, or is it the moonlight draining your colour?' He peered into her face.

'I'm all right. Just a little tired. Too many late nights.' She sounded a little short. Anthony put an arm round her shoulder, rested his cheek on her hair. 'And Friday is a long day. Never mind, you'll feel infinitely refreshed tomorrow in the Immensity of Central Otago - it has that effect. And tomorrow night we'll just wander by the lake. Nothing like solitude.'

Dinah thought it was a pity he had to be so charming.

You could resent him more if he wasn't.

She made up her mind before she drifted off to sleep that she'd take what was coming and enjoy it to the full, even if at the end of it all, her world turned upside down. If Tony Bryn-Morgan could play lightheartedly at love so could she! Dinah felt relaxed and young.

It was hard to feel anything else with four older people so obviously enjoying themselves, delighting in the company of the two younger ones.

They went south to Milton and beyond then bore west the road narrowing through the Manuka Gorge that was an ice-trap in winter but dry now, the road climbing and dipping through rounded hills, by pleasant prosperous farms, mainly sheep, through quaint little towns with a Sleepy Hollow air, dreaming possibly of the golden past with fortunes to be dug from the hills and sluiced from the mighty Clutha river, towns whose only legacy from the past was in derelict or converted buildings that bore testimony that once this had been a wild and lawless area, with every second building a pub or at gambling saloon.

They came to the great fruit-growing lands, under the shadow of Mount Bengier, the peacock-blue of the Clutha roaring below, harnessed above Roxburgh to supply a colossal amount of power for industry, then on, ever climbing, with before them distant, great mountains, even in this heat still pocketed with snow. .

And gradually the nature of the countryside changed, becoming rougher hewn, more relentless, great jagged outcrops of schist rock thrusting through the yellowed tussock. They donned dark glasses, turned on the cool air from the fan to make the trip more bearable.

They came to the dreamy peace of Lake Hayes, encircled by more gentle mountains than the other lakes and girdled by more trees, most of them poplars that would make a glory in April and May.

They came down towards the lake edge, rose again a little to pass a long two-storey building of local stone. Anthony said, waving to it, 'That's the Stables, Dinah and Kate, where we'll be staying, but we're going on now to the Homestead. Megan will be on the watch, I guess.'

She wasn't. They got right up to the veranda and into the house, guided by peals of laughter interspersed with exclamations of rue, into a room which was evidently a playroom.

Megan had Bronwen, a small girl of six, on a table, laughing and scolding at the same time. .

'Bronwen! How could you? Today of all days! Now your hair will have to be washed. However will I get it done before they get here? Why couldn't you have asked me to reach it down for you?'

Bronwen knew the answer to that one. 'Because you'd just have said "In a minute", Mummy, and I wanted it now. Ooooh, it's running in my mouth! It tastes horrid.'

Her mother scooped up a nappy from a pile folded on the table, made a comprehensive wipe at the glue that was cascading from the crown of Bronwen's pale golden head, over her shoulders and on to the table. A small boy of about fifteen months, staggering about on uncertain legs, wailed miserably.

The unobserved crowd in the doorway burst into peals of laughter. Megan swung round and registered horror, then laughed herself.

Mrs. Bryn-Morgan surged forward, cried, 'Bronwen darling!' most ecstatically, to the small girl, then, just too late, 'No, pet, don't kiss me ... yet! Oh!'

'It looks to me,' said Anthony, 'as if we're all about to get gummed up. Stand back, everyone, no more fond embraces. Mother, you'd better use one of these too.' He handed her another napkin.

'Oh, dear,' said the distracted Morgan, 'whatever will you all think? And I had everything under perfect control till five minutes ago. Will you all go into the living-room while Mum and I cope? Except you,

Tony. You can attend to Owen. Though why he should yell his head off because his sister gets covered in glue I don't know. Except that I was just about to change his pants. Tony, you're quite good at it, so do oblige.'

'I've had to be,' said Tony grinning, 'in sheer self-defence. Sis, you've a genius for untimely accidents, haven't you? Last time I was up here you tossed that soapy water straight out the door on to the new minister. Good job that man had a sense of humour. Here, Owen, stop that row this minute, and let me get at you.'

Fascinated, Dinah watched as Anthony expertly folded a napkin into a sort of kite shape, and with two safety-pins in his mouth, laid Owen flat on the window-seat and, in a most maternal fashion, secured it firmly.

'There!' he said. 'I don't care what you say, Megan, I can put my nephew's breeches on better than you. Mine stay up. You never get them firm enough. Where's his rompers? Oh, I see.' He buttoned the straps over the shoulders.

'Oh, thanks, angel,' said Megan, mopping glue off herself now. 'Dinah, this is a terrible welcome. We aren't always like this, no matter what Tony says. It's just that things happen at the wrong times. As soon as I get this child into a bath and wash her hair, we'll have a cup of tea.'

Dinah couldn't stop chuckling. 'Megan, would you let me come and run the bath? If you touch a door handle or a tap you'll be in trouble. And you're the same, Mrs. Bryn-Morgan.'

Still laughing, Megan indicated the way, Bronwen's sticky hands clasped disastrously round her neck. 'I dare not put her down,' she said.

They quickly ran the water, peeled the child's clothes off, dropped them in a bucket, and got her safely in; Mrs. Bryn-Morgan and Megan removed the gum on themselves. Bronwen condescended to let Dinah wash her hair. Dinah said anxiously, 'Keep the face-cloth well over your eyes, pet.-I don't want to get soap in.'

Anthony poked his head in. 'Scared you lose out in popularity if you do, Di? Oh well, it looks as if the Griffithses will return to normal any moment. Dad's got the kettle on, Meg, and Aunt Hattie is putting out the eats. Shall I beat the gong for Evan and Lloyd?'

'Yes, but beat it hard, they may be some distance.'

It certainly woke the echoes and reverberated among the hills. It touched Dinah with nostalgia for the farm at home. She caught Aunt Kate's eye, knew she felt the same. Aunt Kate was enjoying herself, with small Owen on her knee; Aunt Kate had missed Dai's children.

Evan, Megan's husband, and eight-year-old Lloyd came in. They had to be told about the glue.

'Just the nursery paste stuff, I hope,' said Evan. 'That carpentry stuff I had the other night is so swift-setting, you'd have to shave her head.'

Dinah was towelling Bronwen's hair. She felt it anxiously. 'No, it wasn't too bad. Even so, I feel it will need another wash tonight.'

She looked up to find Anthony's eyes on hers. He smiled slightly. Dinah looked down again. This exchange of understanding glances sometimes almost undermined her. Why did he have to seem so nice?

She was aware that Megan was studying her covertly. It was only natural. Did that mean Anthony hadn't brought many girls up here and she wondered how serious this was? If only they knew!

The conversation flowed about them, leaving Anthony, Megan and Dinah in a little group of their own.

'What made you decide to come to New Zealand, Dinah?' asked Megan, her brown eyes friendly. 'Was it a sudden desire to emigrate, and wasn't it sporting of your aunt to come too? So many older people hate uprooting.'

'Oh, Aunt Kate is a pet, and so young at heart. She loves adventure.'

Anthony answered the other question since Dinah didn't seem to want to, and knowing Megan, it would only be repeated if she wasn't answered.

'Oh, Dinah met Russell Milgrove in Wales - you may have heard he was home for a few months - so she came out here.'

'Because of Russell Milgrove? Isn't that odd? I can't imagine him selling New Zealand to anyone, especially to the extent of making them want to come out here. He's so lukewarm about everything.'

'Look here, Sis, just because you don't like him it isn't to say everyone doesn't. And he's improved, like all of us, with age.'

Megan threw him a sisterly glance. 'Well there was certainly plenty of room for improvement. But maybe my first meeting with him prejudiced me.'

Dinah was grateful for the way Anthony changed the subject.

They decided to go down to the Stables and have their dinner there. Megan had a couple of cold chickens in the fridge for them and a delicious and exotic looking salad prepared. 'You'll enjoy it far more on your own. The kids are getting tired by tea-time.'

Her mother said, 'Your father and I will come down and help you get them bathed and off to bed after the meal. He can tell them their bedtime stories, give Evan a break for once, and then we'll catch upon all our gossip when they're asleep.'

'And Aunt Kate and Aunt Hattie will amuse each other while Dinah and I explore,' said Anthony.

It was idyllic ... but for the doubts in Dinah's mind.

They had converted the stables beautifully, still their original style. They had put in leaded casements, renewed the old doors but kept them still in two halves, with heavy antique-looking hinges. The

furnishings were cottage-chintz with deep comfortable chairs with loose covers. Dinah noticed an abundance of bookshelves, even as at Tangaroa.

Upstairs were two small bedrooms, two doubles. Aunt Hattie and Anthony took the singles. Dinah leaned out of the casement of the room she and her aunt were to share. Virginia creeper rioted over the rough walls and would be a glory in autumn. A rose, shot-silk pink, came right up and nodded in. It was quite charming.

All about the farms the paddocks were golden-yellow, typical of New Zealand in summer. The whole landscape drowsed beneath the sun.

Dinah heard a movement behind her. 'Oh, Aunt Kate,' she said, 'isn't this the most heavenly place, and aren't they the dearest people?'

'Including me?' asked a teasing voice. Anthony's elbow came to join hers on the window-sill.

Her eyes came up to his assessing. 'I'm not quite sure,' she told him frankly.

His good-humoured mouth quirked up at the corners. 'You soon will be sure if I have anything to do with it.'

'What might you mean by that?'

'It wouldn't be good for you to know ... yet.' His fingers came up under her chin, forcing her to look up at him. Dinah? You don't seem to be altogether happy. Not like last week-end. What is it? You've got dark shadows under your eyes.'

Her colour rose a little. 'Is it Russell, Dinah?'

'I suppose it is ... in a way.'

Not Russell, her thoughts ran. Not what you think. But what they said. *About you* .

It was safer to have him think she was fretting about Russell.

'Don't you want to tell me?'

Her voice held irritation. 'You can't always expect me to weep on your shoulder as I did on Mount Flagstaff.'

He pulled a face. 'You *are* prickly. But you're tired, I know.'

Nothing is more maddening than to be excused temper on the grounds of being tired.

'I'm not tired,' she said crossly.

He laughed. 'You are, you know. You sound like Bronwen about seven at night when she doesn't want to go to bed but is so fagged she falls asleep on your knee twisting her topknot round and round.'

It sounded so avuncular, so kindly. It was disarming.

That is, it would if you didn't know there was another side to this man. A ruthless, less admirable side. A fiercely competitive, intensely antagonistic side. That that was the only reason you were here even if, on the surface, it looked as if it was because he and his family liked you. So keep your emotions well under, Dinah.

She said lightly, 'Well, perhaps I was a little tired. It was a big week, but who could help but be refreshed with all this spread out before one?'

'I thought you would like it. At one time I cherished hopes of buying a farm up this way. But Owen died.'

They said nothing for a long time after that. Dinah was struggling with a temptation to believe in Anthony Bryn-Morgan. He had shouldered the burden of the shop so successfully, so ungrudgingly.

Presently Dinah stirred. 'We must go down and help them get the evening meal.'

He smiled, 'You know, I have the idea that none of them mind us having a bit of time together.'

Sunset wore on into a dreamy evening. They all sat out under a gnarled old apple-tree, after the meal, in the warm November evening, drinking coffee and nibbling biscuits and cheese.

Then Aunt Hattie said, 'Now, Elizabeth and Alun, you get away down to Megan's. She'll be so looking forward to hearing all about your trip when the children are in bed. Tony, you and Dinah can be off too. We'll do the dishes, then take a gentle stroll. But I imagine Tony will want to take Dinah on one of those mammoth tramps of his. What it is to be young!'

'Right,' said Anthony. 'Only I won't make it too far tonight. Not as far as I'd planned. Dinah's tired.'

Dinah said instantly, 'Oh, I'd love a really long tramp. I've never had the opportunity yet. It would do me good.' He said to her, as they strolled up to the house, 'Meaning you want to walk things off?'

She smiled. 'Perhaps I did, but that's not complimentary to you, is it? Sorry to be so moody, Tony, when you've set yourself out to give me a good week-end.'

That was better ... she mustn't let him guess what had upset her.

His fingers instantly felt for hers. 'It's all right, in any case, Dinah. We can't always be on the heights. I've sometimes had moods to work off. At first, when I went back to the shop, I had plenty. I used to think if only I could walk it off that I'd not be in so much danger of taking my dirty temper out on the staff. But I

gradually disciplined myself.'

They had gained the living-room by now. He stopped, looked down into her face, said, 'Anyway, we're pals, aren't we? Can't pals fit into not-so-bright a mood as well as into top-of-the-world ones?'

'Thank you, Tony,' she said a little unsteadily. You had to accept things at their face value.

'You'd better make it slacks and take a jacket. It could get cold later and we've a bit of rough climbing to do on the top, but it's worth it for the view.'

She told herself it was foolish to be so glad the way was rough, that she needed a hand so often.

They sat down on a rock, admirably adapted by Nature to rest puffed-out climbers, leaned back. Anthony slipped an arm about her. 'Rocks can be hard at your back,' he said, eyes mischievous.

Darkness fell. Below the lake glimmered faintly, rippled by the breeze till it looked like a sheet of beaten silver, the Man in the Moon turned the light on. All around Lake Hayes lights of farmsteads and holiday cottages glowed out, some rosy, some amber, some silver-white.

She didn't know how long they sat there, in silence, his hand covering hers, his other arm warm about her. Odd how comforting it could be to have your hand lost in the size and strength of a man's hand. Peace seeped into her. The questionings in her mind lulled into insignificance. She turned her head sideways against him and slept.

She woke suddenly and in an instant was aware she had slept like that for some time. .

'Oh hullo, Dinah darling, you're awake. You needed that.'

She felt drowsily content. Suddenly she wanted to know something.

'Anthony?'

'Yes, Dinah?'

'Why did you push Russell into the frog-pond?' She felt him stiffen.

'Why do you want to know?'

'Curiosity.'

He said, anew she thought there was reluctance in his tone, 'Look, Dinah, it's ancient history now. I expect we were both rotten little beggars. Leave it at that.'

She was silent, then managed a flat, 'All right.'

How could he know that she had hoped that somehow the reason for it might prove he didn't feel rivalry for Russell? How silly, how could it prove anything?

Anthony must have resented the flatness of her tone, for he pulled her off the rock, close to him.

'Listen, Dinah, do we have to talk about Milgrove?' His voice was savage. 'It's a compliment to me, isn't it? To bring a girl up and have her talk about Milgrove all the time.'

She felt bewildered. 'But, Tony, we've been here hours ... and I've only just mentioned him. What-?'

'It amounts to the same thing. All our conversations lead back to him.'

She said rebukingly, shaking a little in his angry, close hold, 'But, Tony, he is, after all, the reason why I came half-way across the world.'

'Yes, i know. And it's the only thing to be said in his favour. For heaven's sake let's forget him tonight. Like this.'

His lips came down on hers.

Dinah didn't think she'd ever been kissed in anger before.

At first, because of her own anger, she tried to resist, then the same sweetness she had known before took possession of her, something she had never quite reached with Russell.

Well, she couldn't see anything but heartbreak ahead, but she was glad, glad, glad it had happened. Glad she had crossed the oceans, glad she had said good-bye to all that was known and dear and familiar, glad she had come to work for Anthony Bryn-Morgan, glad he was kissing her like this. Because when it was all over at least she would have experienced, for a fleeting moment, a little of the ecstasy she would have known if he had loved her.

They came down the hill rather silently, picking their way between the rocks, soon to go inside, to leave behind the enchantment of that Otago moon, reflected in the waters of the lake. Never again a night quite like this.

CHAPTER TEN

THE next day was just a pleasant family day. Dinah was glad to have it so. Better not to be alone with Anthony again. They went to church in the morning, Alun Bryn-Morgan beaming with pride as he ushered the ten of them in. 'Just like old days,' he whispered to Dinah, taking his place beside her. 'I came of a large family, we always filled two pews.'

Dinah found herself envying Megan and Evan. There they were, their lives resolved, their path plain before them. But maybe they too had known doubts, fears, in their earlier years. Easy enough, probably, to think that for others the course of true love had run smoothly.

They all had dinner at the Stables, sitting out afterwards under the trees, the sun glinting on the lake waters.

Evan said suddenly, 'We'll be saying good-bye to our neighbours soon, the Bridlingtons. They're retiring in Queenstown, putting the place on the market next week.'

Dinah was looking at the table. Anthony had his hand resting lightly on it. It clenched till the muscles tightened, then relaxed. She did not look at him as he said easily, 'Nice farm for someone. Bridlington's really improved that place.'

He rose. 'Come on, brats, that includes you, Dinah. Let's take the kids off and leave these folk to catch up on all they've meant to say and haven't.'

Megan caught at Dinah's hand. 'I hope you're used to my brother's ways. He's at his most loving when he's most insulting.'

Anthony grinned. 'She's not yet worked that out for herself. But you don't have to explain me, Meg darling. Dinah understands me.'

Did she? Dinah asked herself.

Megan called after them, 'We'll have a meal sharp at five, Tony. Or you'll be so late getting back.'

This was the children's afternoon, and they exploited it to the full. Dinah was still conscious of that questioning within her, watching Tony with them. Even if he was an adopted son he was tremendously like his father in his enjoyment of family life, his calm acceptance of the squalls and moods. Yet he had said he wasn't a marrying man. Had he really meant that?

Somewhere during the afternoon Dinah completely made up her mind. About her future. It wouldn't have Anthony Bryn-Morgan in it, of course, but neither would it have Russell.

They were fairly quiet on the drive back, pleasantly tired. Suddenly Alun Bryn-Morgan said, 'Son, will you go up to the Christchurch warehouses in about ten days' time? I'll take on at the shop. We ought to do what we've done so often, buy up all the bits and pieces for the Christmas trade, get all the oddments at a discount. Airini could take over Dinah's duties, and it would give Dinah the chance to see the country between here and Christchurch. So far she's seen it only from the train.'

'Yes, and give her an insight into the buying side too.

Right, Dad, if you'll free Mrs. Betson to come too.'

'Well, it's pretty busy ... it's hotting up now for festive trade, though if you think-

'I certainly do. Not fair to Dinah otherwise, with a fellow of my reputation.'

He laughed, but they knew he was dead serious.

'Oh, son,' said Elizabeth Bryn-Morgan, 'that's over and done with and forgotten.'

'Not by me, Mother.'

There were a few moments when all sorts of unspoken questions and comments hung on the air. Then Aunt Kate said, 'Tony, I wonder if you could stop for a moment. The bridge we just passed with the poplars beside it and the creek tumbling down that chasm - I'd love to make a lightning sketch of it.'

No doubt it was done deliberately to change the subject, but afterwards, two days after, Dinah was to regret her aunt's kindly impulse. She'd liked to have been armed with knowledge instead of having to fumble her way through to truth.

She was sorry that on the Monday Russell should be working late and she had no opportunity of seeing him. Better to make the thing clear-cut now. Not that she any longer cared if his excuses were real ones or not ... except that his treatment of her had made her so uncertain of herself that she was reading into every gesture of Anthony's, nothing but the desire to queer Russell's pitch.

But she said on the phone, 'Russell, I particularly wanted to see you. How about Tuesday night? Would you come and take me out for a drive?'

But Russell couldn't take her out on Tuesday, either, it seemed. He was dining out, somebody important. Well, it couldn't be helped, but Dinah had the desperate feeling that she must put paid to this understanding - or lack of understanding - as soon as she could. It wasn't the sort of thing that could be sandwiched into a lunch-hour, or before Russell's always important engagements. It was maddening.

She said, a little break in her voice, 'Well, will you be busy all evening, Russell? Could you come afterwards? It wouldn't matter if it was quite late, even.'

He was being maddeningly patient, humouring her. 'Dinah dear, I just don't think it possible. I'd like' to leave myself really free in case this chap suggests something after dinner.'

Fair enough, only ... Dinah said flatly, 'Well, it will have to be Wednesday night. Could we make it a drive?'

'I'd rather we took in a film. I'd like to see the one at St. James. How would it be if I got tickets for that? It finishes Thursday night, and I've got something on Thursday.'

Why are you so set on a drive?'

Dinah said distinctly, 'It could just be, Russell, that I wanted to be alone with you.'

That was just trying him out, to see how he would respond. The imp at the back of her mind chuckled when he sounded a little embarrassed. Oh no, Dinah, you goose, this wasn't the man for you, no red blood in his veins at all; lukewarm, Megan had called him.

Russell said, 'Well, all right, dear. Though we could have had a little time together afterwards. I'll call for you Wednesday night. Where would you suggest we go? Up to the Centennial Lookout?'

'No,' said Dinah hastily, with a recoil that was apparent even to Russell at the other end of the line. 'We - we can decide when you come.'

She was sorry, when on Monday night Mrs. Milgrove rang her up and asked her for dinner Tuesday night. She would so much rather have seen Russell first, before meeting his mother again. As it was, if Mrs. Milgrove began planning anything, it might be difficult to head her off without giving away the fact that she was giving Russell up, and Russell must be told first. And she dared not plead a former engagement because Russell had probably said that Dinah appeared to be at a loose end that night!

Mrs. Milgrove was all affability, even coying to make out there had never been tension between them. Dinah was being welcomed into the family now in a way that hadn't seemed possible at first. Dinah thought despairingly: This is all because she dislikes and fears Jenny even more. What a mess!

Dinah went on feeling hypocritical. Mrs. Milgrove had a pot plant for Aunt Kate, a most luxurious and beautiful maidenhair fern. Dinah hoped her thanks sounded sincere.

Suddenly Mrs. Milgrove said, 'Dinah, at one time I thought when you and Russell were married perhaps you would like to just live here' - Dinah shuddered inwardly 'but I've come to the conclusion that young people are better on their own, so I've suggested to him that he look around for a section and see an architect. Everything of the most modern, I thought you might prefer. Is that what you would like, dear, or should I leave it to you and Russell to discuss?'

Dinah leaned on the table, said earnestly, 'Mrs. Milgrove, I don't think either of us is quite ready yet to be talking about anything as definite as house-plans. It's very sweet of you to suggest it, but we did decide on a six months' trial, so that we could find if we were really suited.'

Mrs. Milgrove smiled. 'But that was before I met you, dear.'

'Thank you,' said Dinah stiffly, 'but I've got to be sure too. And I'm not.'

Oh dear, she mustn't go further than that. She must tell Russell first.

They washed up and returned to the drawing-room. Dinah looked at the clock, wondered when she could reasonably get away. It was so difficult to make conversation; they had no mutual friends, the Bryn-Morgans were definitely taboo so she couldn't talk shop, and she wanted to keep off the subject of Russell. The going was hard.

Suddenly Mrs. Milgrove said, 'Would you keep the week-end after next quite free, Dinah? Your aunt too? I'm thinking of having a little dinner-party for some of Russell's friends

. and mine to meet you. Not relatives, ours are all in theNorthIsland , but some of his business associates and their wives; my solicitor, a charming man, a widower, and a few old and dear friends.'

Dinah felt her colour come up. 'I'm sorry, Mrs. Milgrove, I'll be inChristchurch with my employer.'

She added hurriedly as she saw the look on Mrs. Milgrove's face, 'A business trip of course.'

Mrs. Milgrove's bosom swelled, her boot-button eyes took on a familiar malicious look.

'Dinah! It's not fitting that my son's fiancee should be gallivanting all over the SouthIsland with a man like Anthony Bryn-Morgan.'

A tawny spark appeared in Dinah's green eyes. 'I *amnot* your son's fiancee, Mrs. Milgrove.' Her tone, as yet, was restrained, but definite. 'You and my aunt saw to that when you both, wisely, put your veto on a hasty engagement. And one thing I would make clear... as far as I'm concerned, Anthony Bryn-Morgan would never betray my aunt's trust in him. She trusts him absolutely. *And so do I!* '

Mrs. Milgrove snorted, albeit she was still sufficiently in control to snort in the most refined manner possible.

'My dear child. Despite a certain distressing frankness I noticed in you at first ... I mean about animals ... I must suppose you are rather naive about some things. Anthony Bryn-Morgan *is not* to be trusted.'

Dinah came to her feet, her red hair sprang aggressively from its widow's peak, her eyes sparked dangerously. 'You shall not say anything about Anthony Bryn-Morgan! He's chivalry itself!'

Mrs. Milgrove permitted herself to look amused. 'Dinah!

It's ridiculous to spring to his defence like this. The facts were cold hard ones. The story was common property all over Dunedin.'

'What facts could *you* possibly know?'

'They were very plain and most conclusive. She was a silver-blonde, very conscious of figure and clothes. She was his secretary. She had a child. Anthony Bryn-Morgan paid the nursing-home expenses, bought a most expensive layette.'

Mrs. Milgrove closed her lips like a trap. Now Dinah would apologize.

She was completely taken aback by Dinah's sudden starry-eyed look. It lit her eyes, lifted the corners of her mouth. She laughed, a laugh that held triumph, satisfaction.

'Ah ... at last I know! I know exactly how it would be. Poor Anthony, the tender-hearted, the compassionate. Anthony the quixotic! *Of course* he would pay the bill! Of course he would pick the very best out of the baby-linen department! He'd be sorry for the girl, for the baby. He wouldn't be able to do anything but help. I bet he paid her full wages while she was working too. No wonder that now, if he thinks any member - female member - of the staff is in financial difficulties, he does it through the Welfare Officer. No wonder he wanted a plain, middle-aged secretary. Why on earth didn't I ask Betsy or Cleo about it? It's perfectly plain. Only people who don't really know him ... or have reason not to like him ... would believe it.'

She heard a noise behind her. The shutting of a door. She turned.

Russell. Russell with a look on his face that meant he had heard most, if not all, of the quarrel.

He said severely, 'Dinah! What utter rot. What complete foolishness. You're deluding yourself. That fellow Bryn-Morgan has bewitched you. Not only that, but he's set you against me. Goodness knows what lies he's been filling you up with.'

Dinah's voice was very quiet, but steady and purposeful.

'He hasn't, you know. I asked him something about you once, but he wouldn't answer. I felt at the time it was because it was not to your advantage. Why *did* he push you in the frog-pond, Russell?'

Russell's very ears went red. Dinah laughed. 'No, don't tell me. Kids' fights should be forgotten. Only I *was* curious, and he wouldn't tell me. And I think his reasons were probably nicer ones than yours. You've answered me, anyway, if not in words.'

Russell was starting to say something, but Dinah cut in. 'Russell, tell me one thing - do you *really* believe that if Anthony Bryn-Morgan knew he was responsible for that girl's baby, he would have let her face it alone? Do *you*?'

He tried to summon up enough conviction to answer her that he did, but failed.

'W e-ell,' he said, and stopped.

Dinah's look was completely contemptuous. 'You lily-livered hound!' she said, and could have laughed madly at the look on Mrs. Milgrove's face. 'You never did believe it, you only tried to persuade yourself to. That's even more despicable.'

She stopped. Where did she go from here? She didn't even have the satisfaction of tearing a ring off. But she must finish it.

' Russell, I wanted to see you tomorrow night to wind things up. Decently and in order. The six months' probation was a little too long. I've known for some time that I could never marry you. It was to be just between the two of us, and I hoped I wouldn't lose my temper ... but hearing Anthony Bryn-Morgan slandered was more than I could bear. We aren't suited. It was just an attraction. For you as well as for me. You've never really got over Jenny, have you?'

Mrs. Milgrove gave a moan. 'Jenny! But it was *Cleo* he took out on Saturday night.'

Dinah wanted to laugh. Oh dear, she wasn't getting hysterical, was she? No wonder Mrs. Milgrove was getting panicky. She didn't like red hair, but Cleo! Made up like an actress, no doubt Mrs. Milgrove would say. Cleo, who turned heads wherever she went, who looked like everybody's idea of a good-time girl, and who was really rather simple and naive despite the worldly flippancy she used for conversation.

Dinah couldn't help it, she was mad clear through because of what they had said of her employer. Of the man she loved.

She said, an undercurrent of laughter in her voice, 'Why, Cleo would be the very one for Russell. *She'd* keep a man on his toes. Cleo has ambition. An ambitious wife is right for a man who wants to get to the top. Russell would rise trying to keep up with her.'

Mrs. Milgrove closed her eyes. 'Cleo!' she said. 'Cleopatra! And her father was a gardener.'

Dinah wanted to choke. She said unsteadily, if it's any comfort to you her name really isn't Cleopatra. It's quite a nice old-fashioned name, Clorinda. Goes better with wigs and gowns than Dinah. Mine only goes with Eena, deena, dinah, doh!'

Russell said awfully, 'Dinah, you're behaving atrociously.'

'I know.' It was mock repentance. 'But it's such a relief. I've felt so unnatural, so repressed. It couldn't last. Not with ginger hair.'

'Russell was dignified. It looks to me as I've just been used,' he said stiffly.

'Used? What-?'

'To bring Tony Bryn-Morgan to the point. He's always wanted what I wanted. I hope he's satisfied.'

Dinah swallowed. She lifted her eyes, looked straight at Russell in a really frank look.

'He doesn't know I'm breaking it off with you. He doesn't love me. He doesn't even know I'd rather die than let anyone run him down. He never will know. I'll see this job through till the slack time in January, then I'll take some job in the country.'

Mrs. Milgrove had been dabbing at her eyes, but now she lowered the handkerchief, looked across at Dinah.

'Then' - she rose - 'my dear, this is just a storm in a teacup with misunderstandings all round. Would it help if I said that I feel you are just the wife for Russell? The two of you ought to go off in the car together, get this all straightened out.'

'No, but thanks all the same. There's only one man for me, and he's not serious about me. And for Russell' - she looked across at him, all anger gone - 'it's Jenny, isn't it?'

He did not answer, so she said gently, 'I expect Jenny wouldn't come out with you on Saturday night. That would be why you asked Cleo. To get even. Quite understandable. But it could be that your mother has told Jenny about me. Or she may have heard it indirectly. You could tell her things between us are all washed up.'

She turned to Mrs. Milgrove. 'I still feel bewildered about your change of attitude, Mrs. Milgrove. If you really want your son to be happy I think you should withdraw your objection to Jenny. Otherwise you may lose him altogether, or make him very unhappy. No, Russell, I won't allow you to take me home. I'll walk.'

She picked up the pot of maidenhair fern, and as she did so some writing material slid to the carpet, a pad, loose pages with some writing on, a clipping.

Mrs. Milgrove rose very quickly for her bulk, but not quite quickly enough. Dinah put them on the table, tried to rearrange them neatly. The clipping was on top. She recognized the photograph immediately. A portly man with silver hair. The Cabinet Minister. Beneath was a report of the speech he had made in Christchurch. Her father's name leaped out of the print at her. Oddly enough the stenographer who took down this report for me, Miss Dinah Pritchard, was a daughter of that famed scientist, Sir Meredith Pritchard, head of the Morvenwyth Veterinary College in North Wales...'

Dinah's eyes dropped without apology to the sheet of writing paper. Mrs. Milgrove had been trying something out. She had had three attempts. Trying to work out the wording of an engagement. 'Dinah, only daughter of the late Sir Meredith Pritchard of Wales.'

She had an idea that to do Russell justice he knew nothing of this.

But she looked directly at Mrs. Milgrove. 'You arrogant snob,' she said. She put the maidenhair fern back on the table. 'I don't think we'll want any mementoes of this association,' and walked out of their lives.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SHE did not tell Aunt Kate the next morning. She might burst into tears if she did, and you could always tell when redheads had had a good howl. She wanted no questioning from Anthony Bryn-Morgan, no more chivalry. She didn't want a man that way. Besides, the longer she postponed telling Aunt Kate the better. Aunt Kate would tell Anthony.

But Anthony had other things on his mind. Dinah had noticed that Mr. Bryn-Morgan senior had been showing businessmen around the establishment the day before, but she was quite unprepared when Anthony said, 'Dinah, I've something to tell you.'

She looked surprised. He usually kept to Miss Pritchard in shop hours.

'Yes, Mr. Anthony?'

'You can put that ballpoint away. It distracts me. I'm not dictating. I - this is something that could affect my whole life - possibly yours too, in that-' He broke off.

Dinah betrayed nothing of her racing heart, her sudden hopes, that after all ... but oh, why pick business hours? Anyone could interrupt at any moment, the phone ring, a traveller come. But what matter if -'

'You know Megan said that the next sheep station to them was up for sale?'

Dinah's head came out of the clouds. 'Well, Dad's offered to buy it for me.'

'But - but you couldn't run that from here, like Tangaroa. Oh, you mean put a manager in?'

'No. Dad isn't asking that. He knew that I always dreamed of a run in Central. Especially by the lake: To go there to live, he means. To farm it myself. He's had an approach from a firm in the North Island. They have branches in every sizeable city up there. They've just opened one in Christchurch. Dad said he knew my heart was really in farming. I - I told him I couldn't decide right away.'

Their eyes met, the blue and the hazel-green. Dinah knew what he had meant now ... it could affect your life too ... just that she would have a new boss. Steady, Dinah.

She said softly, 'It's the rest of your life, Anthony.'

He nodded. 'That's what Dad said. He said he was definitely retiring and that he had never believed in a man trying to live on in his son.'

'That's more than some fathers would say.'

'Yes.'

'I can't really advise you on this, Anthony.'

'Can't you? I thought-'

She shook her head. 'It's for you alone to decide.'

He got up, went to the window, stood looking out. He turned, said to her, 'Come here, Dinah.'

She joined him.

He waved at the windows opposite where, at this time of day, the name on the edge of the veranda of Bryn-Morgan's was clearly reflected.

'Bryn-Morgan's,' he said. 'It's been there since 1872 when Dad's grandfather opened this shop - a one-window affair.'

He looked down on her, sombrely.

She said, 'I think you've already decided, haven't you, Tony?'

'Yes, I think I have. I'll stay.'

To her horror Dinah felt a rush of tears to her eyes. She turned swiftly away to hide them.

Anthony's arm reached out, drew her back. 'I rather appreciate those tears, Dinah, but don't be too sorry. I wrestled most of it out last night. I've changed a lot. We do. We ought to. Because I never realized it, the dream of Central Otago remained just that, a dream. Then suddenly it seemed as if it were to be handed to me on a platter. Then all of a sudden I realized I'd hate to leave the shop. It's part of me now. I have Tangaroa, only a small farm, but enough to satisfy. I'd miss this, the staff coming with their problems, the challenge of keeping up with fierce competition, the friendship of the men in the departments. Even dictating to a redheaded secretary who wants to throw things at me sometimes. It'll do me.'

Dinah traced the pattern of the carpet with her toe. It was only partly true, she knew. Those things couldn't quite compensate Anthony for summer hours and winter storms on hill and paddock, for snow on the mountains above the lake, country sights and sounds, long days in the open air ... Anthony Bryn-Morgan, in whose veins ran without doubt generation upon generation of farming folk, however unknown ...

'You may need more time to think it over,' she suggested.

'No. This is the right decision. And Dad is all strung up.

He's down in the window-dresser's studio. Would you ask him to come up, Dinah?'

'Yes, sir,' she said, smiling. 'I'll stay downstairs for a little while and tell Airini you're not to be disturbed.'

Alun Bryn-Morgan was discussing a window display with Mr. Gladstone. Dinah waited till they finished, pausing unseen in the doorway. They turned, she smiled, 'Oh, good morning, Mr. Bryn-Morgan. Mr. Anthony wondered if you could spare him a few moments, sir.'

The eager way the older man came towards her revealed how much he cared, how much he hoped Anthony had already made his decision.

'Dinah, did Tony tell you?'

'You mean about the offer? Yes.'

'Good. I told him to. What do you think, my dear?'

She looked away. 'I think he'd prefer to tell you himself, sir. But I'll just say I approve his decision. I'm not coming back up for some time. I've some shopping to do.'

She watched him spring up the stairs two at a time, a crease between her brows. Naturally Bryn-Morgan senior would like to see his son marry, to see the name go on, and thought Tony was looking her way.

She stopped by the cosmetics counter. Cleo was removing sample strokes of lipstick from her left hand. 'Between this and eyebrow pencils, I get in a mess. Oh, Dinah, I've been wanting to see you. I - I've something to tell you.'

'Oh, not to worry, Cleo,' Dinah grinned. 'Even if confession is good for the soul, there's no need. I know you were out with Russell Saturday night. I couldn't care less. That's all washed up.'

'Well, thank goodness for that. I hated to see you throwing yourself away on a stuffed shirt like that. I went out with him out of sheer curiosity. And what do you think? I couldn't get the full strength of it, but I had the impression he was parading me, and that he purposely manoeuvred things so that during the interval he could run up against a couple of girls and introduce me - Jennifer Calder and a Beverley someone.'

Dinah chuckled. Poor Russell. Trying to make Jenny jealous. Oh, there'd be a happy ending there. She told Cleo. Cleo said, 'Wait a bit while I get rid of this customer among the perfumes. Do hang round, I must know something.'

Dinah thought it had to do with Russell, so she bought a pair of tights and came back to the beauty aids. Cleo was looping lavender ribbons through some vanity bags for display purposes and attaching silver paper hearts to them.

'Don't hold out on me,' she said in a low voice. 'I wouldn't pass it on to anyone till you were ready to make it public ... honest Did the chief bring things to a head this week-end?'

Dinah was glad her colour didn't rise. 'Oh, that's not the reason I broke with Russell, you romantic goose. There's nothing but friendship between Mr. Anthony and me, just all of a piece with my aunt and me meeting up with his people in Canada and liking them so much.'

'Yes?' Cleo's expression was comically disbelieving. Dinah said in a tone that carried conviction, 'Cleo, if there was something in it, you'd be the first to know. He's a confirmed bachelor, and, as he told me once, not a marrying man.'

Cleo looked at her sharply. 'I rather think you may be a little off-beam, pet. Tell me, has anyone been repeating gossip? Because I'll tell you here and now that while people may whisper outside Bryn-Morgan's the staff don't. We know Anthony Bryn-Morgan and we knew that secretary of his too. Eloise Harper.'

Dinah said promptly, 'Cleo, I fell out with Russell and his mother defending the chief on that score. I was rather handicapped by not knowing anything about it save what they said. I think I knew what had happened by instinct. Tell me, was it mistaken chivalry? Did he just help an unfortunate girl financially over a bad time?'

'You're pretty near dead right. Except that word unfortunate. He could have picked someone more deserving to be chivalrous to, but he wasn't used to her sort. By heaven, I'd like to scotch that yarn. But how can anyone? The chief can't. A man has no defence against that sort of thing. And the. whispering goes on. I knew who was responsible all right. Believe it or not, but she's married to the chap now. At the time he'd have lost a job he was applying for if there had been any scandal. He's the real confidence man type. Oh, darn, half the women in Dunedin are out shopping this morning, I can't think how they ever keep their houses clean. Come back later if there's anything else you'd like to know.'

'No, thanks. It tied up with what I'd worked out for myself. So long, Cleo.'

Anthony said to her later, 'How about a film tonight, or tomorrow night?'

She let herself sound regretful but firm. 'Sorry, I'm not free.'

'Then what about Saturday night?'

She hesitated. 'I'm sorry, Anthony, I feel I must have one week-end completely at home. I've not had one for some time, as you know.'

He looked at her suspiciously. 'You don't sound particularly frank, Dinah. Why don't you just say you're going out with Milgrove? We've never been cagey with each other.'

'I was completely honest about the week-end, Tony. Aunt Kate and I feel we need one to ourselves.'

To her surprise he walked out of the office. Dinah looked after him. He really did get his hackles up where Russell was concerned. The old enmity must still smoulder. But she wasn't going out with him again; there was a heady sweetness in it, a danger of revealing how she felt. How humiliating to be serious about a man whose feelings were not involved, who only took her out to annoy a rival.

On the Monday morning he said, quite sharply, 'Well, I trust you're quite refreshed, Miss Pritchard, otherwise I shan't dare ask you to work tonight and tomorrow night before leaving for Christchurch Wednesday morning.'

She lifted her chin a little. 'Of course I'll work overtime.'

It was your father's idea, you know, Mr. Anthony, that I should go. You don't have to take me if you feel I'd be better employed here.'

He stared. 'What's the matter with you? Things not going too well between you and your precious Russell? But you hardly need to bring that into business.'

'I'm not bringing anything into business hours. *You* are. Things are *most* satisfactory between the Milgroves and myself now.'

'Glad to hear it,' said Mr. Anthony Bryn-Morgan. 'If I'm wanted I'm in the reserves.' He was there all morning.

At lunchtime in the cafeteria Dinah was sitting with the head of the reserves staff. He looked at her. 'Aren't you lucky the chief's been with us all morning? Man, that fellow's liver must be out of order. Not like him at all, finding fault with everything.'

Dinah was wary. 'I expect he's doing too much in an effort to be away for a few days. We all get irritable when we're tired, don't we?' She changed the subject.

Things were really hectic the next two days. Both nights, after overtime, Dinah managed to arrange a lift home with Mr. Gladstone, who lived on Highgate.

Anthony emerged from his mood on the Tuesday night and said to her about eight, 'I'll run you home tonight, Dinah.'

She shook her head. 'No, Mr. Gladstone is taking me again.' As he frowned she said, 'You have such a way to go, and we'll have a big drive ahead of us tomorrow.'

'Very well. Did Betsy tell you Miss Morrison is coming too ... from the haberdashery counter?' He looked at her. 'The drive should do you good, you're looking peaky.'

She pulled a face at him. 'No woman really likes to be told she looks peaky. It usually means she looks a hag.'

He grinned. 'A very feminine remark! Fishing for a compliment, were you? Shall I tell you how I think you look? Yes, yes, Mrs. Betson, what is it? All right, I'll come.'

Mrs. Betson came back with him. 'We'd better discuss times,' said Mr. Anthony. 'I'll call for Miss Pritchard at nine, then for you, then for Miss Morrison. She's Northeast Valley, isn't she? Right. I'm

staying in the city for tonight.'

As Mrs. Betson moved off, Dinah said absent-mindedly,

'You could have stayed up home.'

'Well, I did hint, but you didn't take it up.'

Dinah went scarlet. 'I'm sorry. I truly hadn't noticed.'

'I know. That did nothing for my ego. You've hardly been with us this week at all. What's been the matter? I thought' you had enough confidence in me to tell me if something was worrying you.'

'I can't always run to you with my troubles, Mr. Anthony.'

'For heaven's sake say Tony. There's no one near. What's the trouble? Mrs. Milgrove being poisonous again?'

'Oh, no. I now have Mrs. Milgrove's full approval. She wanted to have a dinner-party this week-end and have me meet Russell's colleagues and a few cronies of hers, including the family solicitor.'

'How come?'

Her tone was wry. 'Not a ease of suddenly being liked for one's self. No. A bit of Mr. Silverson's speech, complete with photo, got into the *Weekly News* . Did you see it? So Mrs. Milgrove found out my father was knighted. She thinks it will sound very nice on the engagement notices. She's already been trying out the wording.'

She was being deliberately ambiguous. To find out how he would react? React to what? To the

knowledge that Russell had won?

He grew very still. Then he said rather more slowly than he usually spoke, 'So I take it that with the seal of Mrs. Milgrove's approval, you go straight downhill now to that happy ending?'

'Yes.' Better for him to think that. Then after Christmas she would leave. Would he accept it, or still try to make a rift in the lute?

'And ... it's what you want, Dinah? You don't feel you've ... missed out on anything?'

She said rather breathlessly, 'Well, it's foolish to expect everything to be ideal, isn't it?'

'I suppose so. But then I've never really been good at understanding women. You won't have an easy life, Dinah, married to Russell Milgrove. But maybe he needs a girl like you. Yes, Miss Maybury, I'll come now. Looks as if you've got an order meant for someone else. See you at nine, Miss Pritchard.'

But it wasn't till well after nine he came, and he had picked up Mrs. Betson first and had her in the front of the car with him. He came up the steps, the sun shining on his bright head. Dinah had her luggage out on the patio, Aunt Kate with her. As she watched him come, she felt she could scarcely bear it.

He said to Aunt Kate, 'Mum rang me this morning. She'd like you to meet her at the tea-rooms at three this afternoon if you could manage it.'

'I could. I would enjoy that, Tony. Well, good-bye, Dinah dear, I know you'll enjoy yourself. Good-bye, Tony.'

Enjoy herself! If only Aunt Kate knew.

Anthony opened the back door. 'Miss Morrison will share this with you. It's too hot today for more than two in front, and Betsy sometimes gets car-sick.'

'Oh, only in buses, Mr. Anthony,' said Betsy, making it quite evident that Tony didn't particularly want his secretary beside him today. '

Given other circumstances she would have so enjoyed the two-hundred-mile drive, the change from routine, the long spaces between the towns, the glorious sweep and vastness from the chain of the Alps to the sea, all the way.

They had, outwardly, a glorious time in Christchurch, all putting up at the same hotel facing the gentle Avon, so different from most New Zealand rivers, wending its shallow way serenely through shaven banks bordered by flowerbeds and weeping willows and poplars.

But Dinah was glad when they headed south again late on the Friday afternoon with all the business behind them. She longed to be away from Anthony Bryn-Morgan's disturbing presence, to be at home, to find comfort in little things. Perhaps to garden tomorrow, ramble through the bush. No, not the bush. That was where she had consented to work for him. Where they had hurled hot words at each other, where he had said derisively, 'Doesn't love come like a sunburst any more? Like trumpets on the wind?' And it had. But too late, and unsought.

She dreaded the moment when, at Karitane, they would drop Mrs. Betson and Miss Morrison at Betsy's week-end cottage. There would be another thirty miles or so then, alone, in the friendly darkness, perhaps a moon, certainly starlight, to soften one's resolves, to make one want to be friendly, and it couldn't lead anywhere.

But there wasn't a moon or stars. Long before they got to Karitane the storm blew up. There was always something so spectacular about summer storms. The contrast perhaps. The gusts of wind were so strong that they buffeted the car as they came out every now and then from the lee of the hills or the trees.

At Kartigi where the road ran by the Pacific the sea was a boiling cauldron, with spray dashing right over the road at times, even splashing on to the railway line.

'I've seen it like this only once before,' said Anthony, sitting upright and making driving an art, not the effortless skill it usually seemed with him. 'I hope your crib hasn't got a leaky roof, Betsy. This rain would find out any weak spot.'

'No, it's quite sturdily built. But I hate to think of you driving over the Kilmog and the Motor Highway in this, Mr. Anthony. How about you and Miss Pritchard spending the night too? We've plenty of room. Not five-star luxury, but quite adequate. We could ring through from the store to let your people know.'

'Very kind of you, Betsy, but we'll be all right. It's a splendid road all the way. Miss Pritchard can come in front when we disembark you and help keep a watch out. Visibility is bad, I'll admit.'

They turned off the main road at the psychiatric hospital at Cherry Farm, Anthony insisting on going in to the crib with them and lighting up, bringing in wood and setting their fire going, but he wouldn't stop for a cup of tea. He was rather wet about the shoulders.

Dinah was in the front seat when he got in again, removed his wet coat and started up. She did not sit close to him.

'It's warmer here too,' she said. 'Closer to the heater.'

'Yes. Just imagine, we roasted on the way up.' He turned and reached into the interior of the car, fished up a rug. 'I think you'll need this too.' But he let her tuck it round herself.

They had no small talk, they simply concentrated on peering through the driving rain that was so thick the headlights seemed to be penetrating a wall of mist. Dinah would be glad when they were off the Kilmog. The road was good, and marked by white lines, but twisting and not as wide as she would have liked. It would be all right if other drivers were as careful.

Occasionally, unnoticed, she took a sideways glance at him. The rugged profile, the broad shoulders, the steady eyes ... a wave of longing swept through her, a near-physical pang.

It happened quite suddenly. They rounded a bend cut into a huge clay cliff, and straight into a mass of earth and rock that completely blocked the road.

Anthony made a magnificent effort to pull up, saw he could not do it, turned the wheel a little left to gain

a little more length, and did it all with one arm flung out across Dinah to stop her being hurled into the windscreen. The front wheel mounted a pile of clay, yellow in the headlamps, and the car tipped, spun round, and finished up with its nose in the huge ditch by the side of the road.

Anthony was thrown across her. She managed to put an arm out to save his head crashing against her window. There seemed to be a terrible lot of noise, breaking glass, wrenching metal; they were tossed forward, then sideways. And suddenly all was still.

Then Anthony's voice, urgent, panicky, 'Dinah, are you all right? Are you badly hurt?'

'No, just bruised and shaken. Nothing really. You must have caught the worst of it. How much-'

'I just cut my wrist ... not badly, I think ... and I got the ignition off, so there shouldn't be fire, but get out if you can quickly. Another car could pile up into this. It will have to be your side. Can you get your door open? Mine's hopeless.'

She had a moment of sheer terror thinking of other traffic coming behind, though the road had been clear of cars for miles. She had difficulty, but managed it, and then they were out in the full fury of the storm, stumbling and scrambling away from the car.

They gazed in horror at the landslide. No minor one, this.

They couldn't see over it.

'Now what?' asked Anthony. They stood huddled in the lee of the car and the slip, but the wind whistled over it the ram drove relentlessly in their faces. 'I wonder how long before any traffic comes? Could be five minutes, could be a couple of hours. And something could pile up the other side, coming north. Depends how far from the next bend it is.'

Headlights would probably show it up if it's not too near. Let me think. The traffic department's just got to be alerted to close the road. They could divert traffic round the coast road, Seacliff way.'

Dinah had to cling to him to hear the words, the storm blew them away from her. He looked up at the hill and saw, blessedly, a light winking out. A farmhouse with an outside light on. They must be expecting someone home. God send they didn't crash too. But a farmhouse meant a telephone.

'We've got to make for that house, Dinah, it's the only thing to do. Thank God one car light is still on. The other is smashed, I suppose. That beam will act as a warning, especially as it's pointing upwards enough to look unusual. Let's get up that long drive as fast as we can. Oh, damn this wrist.'

Dinah peered at it, felt the blood, sticky and warm under her fingers. 'Give me your handkerchief. I'll use mine as a pad.' She pressed it on tightly, tied it firmly.

'Come on,' he urged. 'That's a minor thing. We must try to prevent more accidents.'

'Yes, I know, but if it bled too much you could feel faint. Right.'

He had her arm, they struggled down an incline towards a gate that gave access to the road, asking her as they went was she sure she wasn't hurt anywhere.

What a muddy track it was, with water flowing everywhere. They slipped and slid.

'Gosh, this chap could do with a load of gravel. Probably means to put it on before winter. Bad policy. Look, there's a stream cutting across here, it'll just be a corduroy bridge ... logs lashed with wire. Watch those wretched heels, Dinah.'

They stepped on to the bridge. 'Oh, doesn't it feel shaky?' she exclaimed.

'Yes, there's a fair bit of water coming down, nearly up to the top. Hurry, Dinah, we don't know what disturbances have taken place up the gully, she feels mighty ... look out. She's going ... jump!'

He caught Dinah, took a terrific leap, dragging her with him. As they landed on the edge, and pitched

forward with the force of their leap, the bridge disintegrated. They came down in mud, scrabbling for anything to clutch to save them slipping back into the water. One of Dinah's feet trailed in the water, her face hit a rock buried in the squelching mud. She cried out sharply. She felt a swirling and tugging at her feet, struggled to her knees, felt Anthony yanking at her. Then he lifted her bodily, and by a terrific effort gained the top of the bank.

They were both shaken then, one shock upon another, and in the realization that they could have gone down with the bridge, Anthony folded her to him, covered her face with kisses, 'Oh, Dinah, Dinah darling!' Then he held her off. 'Sorry, Dinah, that was reaction. Come on.'

They struggled on. Why on earth had these people built so far up the hill? Perhaps for the view? Perhaps that stream, tiny as it must be normally, was inclined to flood. They were desperately aware that every minute was precious, they must get warnings out.

'Dinah, you aren't lamed? What's this dot-and-carry business? Have you hurt your ankle?'

She managed a laugh. 'No, I lost a shoe in the stream. Look, I think I'll shed the other, it would be easier.'

'Oh, Dinah, and you'd never keep mine on, and what gravel there is on this is so sharp.'

He bent down, wound his scarf round her foot, took her scarf for the other. 'That will keep the stones from bruising your feet too much. Look, darling, it doesn't seem much further. Sorry I can't be like a knight of old and carry you, but I'd never make it uphill.' But he helped her every inch of the way. Dogs began to bark. 'Ah, that'll bring the people out on to the veranda.'

But it didn't. The one naked outside light remained shining. No welcome shaft of light sprang out from an open door.

They struggled to the veranda, pounded on a door. No answer. Anthony turned and went to the end of the veranda, peered into the streaming darkness. 'Thought so. The garage is open, they're out. We'll just have to go in and help ourselves to the phone. We're going to make a mess too. Not that that matters. Hope I don't have to break in, though. And I want a good look at you to make sure you're all right.'

"But the phone first," said Dinah, panting from the climb.

They found a side door unlocked, mercifully, stumbled in, found the switch, flooded the house with light, and there, on the wall, was the phone.

Anthony said, 'Well, if the power is still on, it's ten to one the telephone wires are still up too, though you can never tell with a slip. In any case even a storm without the slip can put them out of action. And let's hope this isn't on an exchange that closes down early. Most country ones go to midnight though, and it can't be eleven yet.'

They got him through as soon as possible. He explained their predicament, asked the exchange to tell him exactly where he must be, so he could give clear instructions to the traffic department.

The girl caught on quickly, asked him to tell her the number of the phone on the dial, said, 'Oh, you're at R J. Moore's,' then gave his very precise instructions as to what to tell the traffic department and added, 'Ring back if there's anything else we can do ... you're through.'

He wasted no time, fearful even as he was talking that the line might go dead. The department said they would go into instant action, they would have it radioed, send patrols out, alert people both sides. They would let Mrs. Livingstone and Mr. Bryn-Morgan know they were safe and well but wouldn't be able to get home till morning - yes, better let them do it, in case the wires went down any moment.

Then he rang back the exchange. 'Any hope of you contacting the owners of this house? I'm most concerned about them, they could be on their way back. Any ideas on how they could be warned?'

The girl thought, then came up with an idea. 'There's one chance. That's a four-party line. I'll tell you the rings. Ring each one and find out, if you can, where the Moores are likely to be. I'll try some places further away, but that's your best bet. We'd better keep in touch as long as we can.'

Anthony was lucky. At the second shot he not only got the information but the Moores were there, at a party.

'It's no use your trying to get home,' he told the startled Mr. Moore, 'even if you could get round the slip, your bridge is gone. Nothing can be done before daylight. I'm afraid you'll have to put up with us having made a sopping wet invasion of your house.'

He was assured that that was less than nothing, they were only glad they were not badly harmed. The man had a kindly Scots burr.

'I'll get my wife and she can tell you where to find all you'll need. There's lashings of hot water always, and usually warm towels on the cylinder. You'd better have hot baths, put plenty of mustard in, and we left the stove stoked up to keep the house a bit warm. Open the damper and put more fuel on. Oh, here's Mother.'

Another Scots burr. Dinah, shivering now, could understand from Anthony's end of the conversation that he was being offered all sorts of comforts.

She saw his face crease into a smile. 'Sorry, we'll have to make use of two bedrooms. It's not my wife but my secretary.' Then, 'Right. Since your bed is already on, my secretary can have that. And I'm to switch the mattress on in which room for myself? ... the second door on the left coming from the kitchen. Oh, good show. Now tell me, I'm a farmer ... how about the milking? Pigs? Yes. Well, we'll meet some time tomorrow no doubt. Good-bye for now, and thanks immensely.

'Well, I only hope I can follow out all those instructions.

Dinah, we've been incredibly lucky. First thing is a good hot bath for you. Yes, I'll have one after you, but I wasn't walking up that ghastly track in nylons. I'll hunt up the bathroom.'

He turned the taps on, went into the main bedroom, got a warm dressing-gown off the back of the door, brought it into the kitchen. He poked up the fire, put some wood in for a quick blaze and marched Dinah to the bathroom. Her fingers were too cold to undo the tightly knotted, soaking and muddy scarves about her feet. He knelt to undo them, then unbuttoned her indescribable coat and said, 'I'll have to leave you to the rest. Mrs. Moore said a clean nightdress was airing on the cylinder. You'll want it as warm as possible, so sing out when you're ready for it. I'll hunt up some slippers too. Then some things for me. Now feel that water first, it may be a little too hot, but take it as hot as you can bear and right up to the chin.'

Dinah started to laugh. 'You must have a whole packet of mustard in, I shall come out saffron.'

She wasn't very long. She wanted him to get out of his wet things too, but the hot water was glorious. Dinah began to come alive again, thankful they were not under the wreckage of the car, beyond aid as they might so easily have been.

She called out, heard him drop the nightgown at the door, go away. She laughed when she saw it - a sprigged flannelette, with sleeves wrist-length and a high buttoned collar. Eminently respectable. But what matter? It was warm and dry. Dinah tied it in at the waist, slipped on the dressing-gown, donned the slippers, came into the kitchen.

She felt warm and rosy, in direct contrast to Anthony whose clothes were plastered to him. He had the kettle boiling and hissing on the coal stove, toast cut, and some tinned soup heating up.

'I won't be long,' he said.

Mr. Moore's pyjamas and dressing-gown fitted him rather better than Mrs. Moore's did Dinah.

'But I'm looking at that hand before we have this delicious supper,' said Dinah.

'It's not really bad, just a flaming nuisance. It keeps opening up and dripping blood everywhere. Poor Mrs. Moore, I've got a tea-towel in a frightful mess.'

'Never mind, I'll soak it in salt and wash it tomorrow. I found the first-aid kit while you were bathing. Not a bad place to find things in. Such tidy cupboards.' She was very conscious of his nearness as she bound it up, his breath was warm on her cheek.

'Your turn. Take your slippers off. I'm going to put some disinfectant ointment or something, even peroxide if she's got nothing else, on those feet.'

They were badly scratched, no more. Dinah looked down on him as he knelt at his task, longed to touch

the crisp, short hair. He looked up suddenly. They both looked away hurriedly.

'I'm not terribly good at bandaging, Dinah. Look at those toes. The bandaging will be off before you get to bed.' 'Well, see if you can find a pair of bedsocks. I'm sure the ample Mrs. Moore would wear bedsocks.'

He brought back a pair of Mr. Moore's clean thick grey farm socks. He put them on for her. Dinah dissolved into giggles.

'Isn't this glamorous?'

He laughed with her, sobered up, said, 'Just as well it isn't. Respectability has to be the keynote tonight. And, Dinah, if Russell says one disparaging word about this escapade, I'll- I'll push his teeth down his throat!'

'Anthony! He wouldn't say a word about it. I can promise you that!'

'You've got more faith in him than I have, that's all. You don't know how cheap sneers can hurt.'

Dinah stood up, her hair loose about her face, the homely dressing-gown tied about her. She put out her hands, caught his, said simply: 'Tony, this was something nobody could help. And I would like you to know I shall sleep very soundly and in complete trust in you this night.'

- He looked down at her hands, said a little unsteadily, 'Thank you, Dinah,' bent and brushed his lips across her fingertips. He released them suddenly, lifted the kettle, rinsed the teapot.

It was suddenly delicious fun. They had come very near to death. They were now warm and comfortable and the hot soup and toast would have been nectar and ambrosia. Dinah was rather sorry when she began to grow drowsy. She wanted to hold time still, to prolong this hour. Intimacy like this would never come again.

Suddenly Anthony got up. 'We can wash the crocks in the morning, it's plain ridiculous to sit on here like this. We need our sleep.' He sounded gruff.

Saturday was a big day. The road at the foot of the farm became a hive of activity. A breakdown truck from Evansdale came round the coast road by Seacliff and they towed the damaged car away. Bulldozers and earth removers began the anunoth task of shifting the slip. Traffic north and south was diverted. It was a glorious day, blue and gold and green, nature sorry for the vindictiveness of the night before.

Dinah managed to clean up the traces of their muddy entrance, she dried and pressed their clothes, washed the night attire they had used and hung it on the line. It was midday before some huge planks were put across the stream and the Moores came over on foot. Following came the Bryn-Morgans and Aunt Kate and Aunt Hattie. They were in the Bryn-Morgans' new car.

Aunt Kate was tearful as she greeted Dinah, 'Darling, it might have been so different.'

There were photographers, pressmen. 'Poor Mrs. Milgrove,' sighed Anthony. 'And anyway, where's Milgrove himself?'

Dinah said quickly, 'I suppose it was too late for it to get into the morning papers, unless just a wee bit in the stop press which could be overlooked.'

'But it's a wonder your aunt didn't ring.'

'Maybe she thought it better to let him rest in blissful ignorance.'

'Yes. Perhaps she hasn't your touching faith in him. This is going to be very public.'

They all came back, eventually, to the Harcourt Street house. 'It would be so tame to part company now,' said Elizabeth Bryn-Morgan. 'Kate would love to have us for Saturday night tea, wouldn't you, Kate?'

Kate would. Dinah smiled wryly. It was going to be hard to keep the Bryn-Morgans at a distance. Pity January was so far away. But she couldn't leave Anthony without a secretary with Christmas approaching. She was glad when they left to go to Tangaroa. For her the glad adventure had ended when the bridge had restored communication.

They were just going to bed at eleven when they got a ring from Megan.

'Dinah, we heard the news over the air, and Evan, the pet, suggested I come down and see for myself how you and Tony are. I rang and rang home this morning, but could get no answer. I should have been here ages ago, but first of all I came on the scene of an accident - nobody badly hurt, but I had to help;.. then I had a puncture miles from anywhere. I had a feeling you might both have landed up in hospital, even just with delayed shock or something, so I thought I'd ring before getting home.'

'Oh, Megan, you can't go all the way to Tangaroa now.

You might fall asleep and go over the edge into the harbour. Where are you ringing from? Oh, Mornington. Well, come straight here and spend the night with us. You can ring the family from here. They should be just about home, they've been here.'

Dinah prepared the spare room joyously. She loved Megan. But then she loved all the Bryn-Morgans. Aunt Kate was delighted.

They sat round the fire yarning; it was chilly again now with the threat of more thundery rain.

'Evan said to stay all day tomorrow, that he could cope and it would do me good, and to go home fairly leisurely on the Monday. I was dying of curiosity and knew I'd never get all the details over the phone. There's something sort of drying-up about knowing you're on toll.'

They gave her breakfast in bed, a luxury for a busy country mother. Megan said, stretching luxuriously, 'I could take a lot of this.' She didn't seem to be in any hurry to go on down to Tangaroa. She had a bath, some morning tea, sat and yarned. She tried, without success, to get Dinah and her aunt to go down to the Bay. Dinah was adamant, so much so that Aunt Kate thought she must be suffering more reaction than she appeared to be, and stopped looking wistful and said no, they couldn't possibly.

Dinah went down the steps to wave Megan off. As she closed the car door on her and Megan pressed the selfstarter, she said suddenly, 'Megan, why did Anthony push Russell Milgrove in the frog-pond?'

One thing about women, they didn't worry about the old school tie and a code of behaviour. Neither did Megan look surprised. Her own conversation was so charmingly inconsequential she didn't question it in others.

'Anthony caught him teasing a frog. Oh, nothing horribly cruel, but it wanted to get back into the water, and he'd let it get right to the edge, then bring it back again. It didn't like being squeezed and tantalized. I was in tears. So Anthony pushed him in. Said, "How do you like that, you great whacking bully? Don't like it, do you? Want to get out, don't you? What if we don't let you?" Anthony let him nearly get out two or three times, and each time pushed him back. It was really rather terrible of us. That's the way accidents happen. And when he was properly scared, Anthony pulled him out. I'm afraid we were little demons.'

'It was poetic justice. I'm glad you did,' said Dinah. 'Well, I mustn't keep you.'

CHAPTER TWELVE

IT was hard to get away from the atmosphere of the accident. Saturday night and Monday morning papers featured it in full detail, the only exciting local happening of the weekend, and the whole staff wanted to hear about it first hand. Dinah got a little tired of it, and it somehow took away the sense of shared adventure to have it all made so public. Oh well, it would soon die down.

TheNorthIsland caught a similar storm on the Monday, so the Tuesday papers, mercifully, were full of that instead. Office routine went back to normal.

Anthony made only one comment. 'Had Russell any adverse comments?'

'No. Not a word,' said Dinah. 'What do you want doing with these, Mr. Anthony?'

She thought he looked at her sharply, but checked whatever else he had been going to say.

'Oh, would you take those sketches to Gladstone ? He'll be in one of the island windows at the front, doing a display for Cleo.'

She took her way downstairs. As she passed the Beauty Corner Cleo put the phone down. 'Are you on your way to the window, Dinah? Would you ask Mr. Gladstone to come to the phone? An outside call.'

'Oh, blast,' said Mr. Gladstone, transferring pins from his mouth to his waistcoat with rapidity. 'Miss Pritchard, be a darling and hold this drape here while I answer it. I've spent about a quarter of an hour getting this effect and haven't got it secure.'

Dinah was practically engulfed by the purple satin. The door of the window was a little ajar to let the air in. What a stifling job this summer weather. Her face was right up against the glass looking back into one of the shop doorways.

A man and a woman paused just outside. Dinah wanted to giggle. 'If they notice me at all,' she thought, 'they'll take me for a dummy, standing stiffly like this, with one arm up. It was tiring too, and she wished Mr. Gladstone would hurry.'

'I wonder if that woman's hair is real? It's really ashblonde. Doesn't look artificial, though. Yet she's got that sort of hard brassy face you so often see under dyed hair. Not a nice type.'

Through the crack of the door she heard the woman say, 'I still think it would be better to tackle him out of business hours.'

'I don't. He's much more vulnerable here in the hub of the business. I've a hunch this is going to be very successful. Best to strike while the iron's hot, anyway. It could mean something big.'

What an odd, horrible conversation. She hoped they wouldn't look up and see her. She kept very still. She also wished the window-dresser would come soon. The woman had disappeared into the shop, the

man was walking about the inner windows. It sounded as if she might be going to make trouble for one of the male assistants. Dinah felt she'd like to be around.

Mr. Gladstone was amazed at the speed with which the boss's secretary disappeared into the men's department. What had got into her? These redheads!

Dinah went up and down the department, through into the Manchester and the dress goods where men also served, came back to the men's department, asked one of the assistants if there was an ash-blonde in a fitting-room anywhere.

He blinked. 'Do you mean accompanying her husband?'

'No. Alone.'

He chuckled. 'We don't often get them into fitting-rooms alone. No such luck!'

Dinah laughed. 'Silly ass! I know it sounds funny, but Ooh, never mind,' and disappeared through the archway, leaving him scratching his head.

Dinah decided it was mysterious enough to report to Mr. Anthony, then if something did eventuate, he would be forewarned. And could protect ...*would* protect ... any member of his staff who might be involved.

She came quickly and quietly into her own office. All the offices. were thickly carpeted. She walked across to the sanctum door, the one that had replaced the swing ones, then paused with her hand on the handle as she realized he had someone with him. Her errand would have to wait.

As always the voices came through clearly. This partition, put in after the fire, didn't go right to the top.

Anthony's voice, controlled but angry, said, 'Had I known what your married name was, Eloise, I wouldn't have admitted you. Or at least I would have insisted on my secretary being here, taking notes. I

wouldn't put anything past you. You're a dangerous woman, as I know to my cost.'

Dinah slowly let go the handle. Eloise. The secretary who had caused all the trouble. And Anthony wished his secretary could be there to take notes. Very well. Dinah silently retreated, cast her eyes about, saw her pad and ball-point. She'd take notes all right, if that would in any way serve Anthony Bryn-Morgan, who had suffered plenty already for a chivalrous impulse.

She knew now the identity of the woman outside the window. A pretty pair, out to make trouble all right, but not with the staff. Her eye lit on a tape recorder, ready for use. Anthony had been going to try over some radio adverts. It was in a good position, near the partition.

She switched it on, hoping desperately that the click could not be heard, but realized the woman's hard and prolonged laugh had drowned it out.

'Chicken!' said Eloise. 'So you don't want to play ball!'

'It would be an endless game. One returning the ball to the other, ad infinitum. Added to which,' Anthony's voice was very self-possessed, 'I happen to have a scorn for people who pay money to blackmailers. They know it won't work. That the demands never stop - that there just isn't any end to it.'

Eloise laughed. This is merely your first reaction, Anthony Bryn-Morgan. A little reflection and you'll realize that it would be much more sensible to pay up. Besides, I think you're taking a poor view of it. I've told you we're going to Australia, We aren't likely to make any demands from there ... it would put us in a bad position, wouldn't it, to have to make demands in black and white. I'm merely asking for one sum - two thousand pounds - or else I'll bring a paternity claim against you, bring you up for support of the child you won't be able to prove is not yours. And mud always sticks. It will affect your business, Till now it's been just a rumour, But if you don't pay up that two thousand I'll see your name stinks.'

Dinah's mind was racing. Was a tape recording regarded as reliable evidence? She didn't know. She'd better do something else, get people here. Anyway, the tape recorder could go on taking the conversation down while she got some witnesses.

She was out of her office like a whirlwind, and straight across the typists' office into Sandy Wilson's the accountant. He looked amazed as she burst in.

'Mr. Wilson, quick!' her gesture as much as her words plucked him out of his chair. 'Tony's being blackmailed - by his former secretary. Quick! He'll need witnesses - I've switched the tape recorder on. But you must be quiet. She mustn't suspect anyone is listening in!'

She'd never seen Sandy Wilson get a bend on before, but this time he certainly acted quickly, He bent over Airini's desk.

'There's a detective in the supervisor's office, get him here - take him quietly into Dinah's office. The chief is in a spot of bother and we want witnesses. You too.'

The Maori girl looked up, the light of battle in her eye.

No one was going to harm a hair of Mr. Anthony's head if she could prevent it. And she knew who was with him.

Sandy Wilson was thrusting Dinah through her door. For one moment Dinah felt she could hardly head or the beating in her ears, yet her every movement was controlled and purposeful. She picked up her pad. She hoped to heaven Anthony was not furious with what she had done ... it could be that things would be said he wouldn't want overheard ... but *hehad* said he wished she was there. Oh, well, she must stand the consequences.

For a sandy-haired man Anthony Bryn-Morgan seemed to have a good hold of his temper.

'It's no use trying to whitewash it, Eloise. *Itis* blackmail. I'm not going to wait for you to bring this trumped-up case against me. *I'm* going to lay a charge against *you* . I'm going to have this thing dragged out into the open once and for all. I've never been able to fight it, there was never anything tangible before. And so help me, I got myself into this fix by feeling sorry for you!

'You come in here, make the most absurd charges I'd always hoped that maybe it wasn't you who started the rumours. I think differently now. I also think the man who was responsible is the rat you've married. I was a greenhorn, wasn't I? So unused to dealing with staff. Right off the turnips, that was me! So sorry for a girl I thought had been badly treated. Kept your wages going, paid those bills. Even offered to see the chap responsible to see if he would marry you if I assisted financially. Remember, you

said he couldn't afford to marry you. Oh, I was carried away by the idea of myself as a philanthropist. I earned myself a reputation instead. But this time you aren't going to get away with it!

'I will, you know. Very few people are as high-minded as you. They like to think the worst of people. Especially rich people. They'll think what a hypocrite ... him a church goer and all. They'd rather think a Bryn-Morgan was a rotter than a sucker. By the time I've finished with you - if you don't pay up - you won't have a shred of reputation left. Especially after your much publicized adventure of the week-end. They may even say you seem to make a habit of sleeping with your secretaries!'

A different note crept into Anthony Bryn-Morgan's voice, a deadly tone, cold anger. 'You'll make yourself a laughingstock. Even my secretary's fiance doesn't think a thing about it. I imagine he's only too thankful his wife-to-be wasn't horribly maimed, even killed. Spending a night with me in an unoccupied house was nothing to that. But you wouldn't understand how he feels, wouldn't know the trust decent men. have in decent girls.*And you'll leave her name out of this .*'

Eloise laughed. 'It sounds to me as if she might be your Achilles heel. Is she, Anthony Bryn-Morgan? Good God, you're in love with her! It's as plain as the nose on your face. Better still! So much for your holy-mindedness. Maybe her fiancé would be interested in what I have to tell him. I've only your word for it that he trusts her. That makes Friday night even more interesting. Better pay up, Anthony Bryn-Morgan.'

The four listeners, Wilson, Dinah, Airini, Detective Sergeant Blundell, were as taut as violin strings, yet Dinah's ball-point never paused in its recording of every damning word with practised speed that would not let her fingers shake.

They could even hear Anthony draw his breath in, they wondered if his control would slip. But Eloise Parkington spoke first.

'So you love her, eh? Well, she won't think much of you when I've finished with you, though.'

Then Anthony's voice, clear, strong, proud. 'You couldn't even begin to understand a girl like her. Yes, I do love her. Loved her from our first meeting. Then I found she was in love with someone else. Fair enough. She had already heard the rumours, knew the reputation I was credited with ... in certain quarters ...*but she doesn't believe them* . She put her trust in me that night. But you wouldn't understand that, wouldn't understand that chastity and trust together are like armour to a girl. That's why I'll fight this. *Because she believes in me* . Because I won't pander to public opinion. Because I think blackmailers are the scum of the earth. Because I think the public should be protected from women like you. Because

I think the police here and in Australia ought to know what you're capable of. They have a hard enough time keeping the world fit to live in without people hushing up things like this. *I'm phoning the police right now, Eloise .*

Detective-Sergeant Blundell flung the door open. 'You needn't bother, Bryn-Morgan,' he said. 'The police are here!' He grinned. He said afterwards it was one of the most enjoyable moments of his career. 'We've got the lot, sir. Everything of the most damning. Miss Pritchard acted most promptly. She was here from the word go, switched on the tape recorder, got out her dictation pad, brought us in as witnesses. Your lucky star is working overtime today. I was with Willis, sixty seconds from here.' He broke off, said, 'Oh, so help me, catch her!'

Eloise Parkington had slid to the floor in a dead faint. Dinah's eyes were shining with unshed tears, Anthony was as white as chalk, Sandy Wilson had forgotten he was a reserved and dour Scot, the things he was muttering about Eloise. Airini's dark eyes were flashing. 'Now, don't tell me I've got to act the ministering angel to that she-devil from hell!' she said, and suddenly Anthony laughed and his usual ruddy colour came back.

Dinah recollected something. She clutched Detective Sergeant Blundell's arm. 'Oh, sir, her husband is downstairs. I heard them cooking it up. But I didn't know what they 'meant, I thought it was shoplifting and rushed up here to warn Mr. Anthony. Come on, sir, let's get him too.'

Blundell rushed her out, grasping her by the elbow in a grip that hurt. Anthony went to follow. His blood was up. His accountant caught his arm.

'No, sir, leave them be. That man won't get away from our Miss Pritchard, believe me. The female of the species and all that. She's got her dander up. Besides, the fellow may know you by sight and cut and run. This one is starting to come round. Should I dash some cold water in her face?'

Anthony grinned. 'I can well imagine how you'd enjoy doing just that. But she'll come round without it. I couldn't care less.'

Airini said, 'Good for you! I'm not one for all this sweet forgiveness, but I was terrified you would be.'

The relief from strain was terrific.

Sandy Wilson looked at him shrewdly. 'I think you'd better let me get you some brandy, lad.'

'No, thanks. To know it had all been taken down was enough. I never thought I'd be able to clear myself.'

Then it struck him. *All*. And Dinah had taken it down.

Heads were turned all over the shop as the boss's secretary and the detective sped through the shop.

'More shoplifting, do you think?' Dinah heard someone say.

She was terrified the man might be gone, but he wasn't.

He was looking at a mercery display. They checked their pace, came up behind him.

He jumped as Blundell tapped him on the shoulder. 'I think you might be Mr. Parkington,' said the big detective suavely. 'I'm afraid your wife has just fainted. Would you like to come up to her?'

Parkington swallowed, his eyes darted sideways. 'I ... well, if she's fainted I'll go and get a taxi and get her away as fast as I can. Yes, that'll be best. Excuse-'

Blundell's hand halted him. 'I don't think she'll be ready to go home for quite a while. I'd advise you to come up with us to Mr. Bryn-Morgan's office, and to come quietly.'

At the familiar ring of the words the man's eyes grew watchful.

Said the Detective-Sergeant briskly, 'She'll be going off in a taxi all right, but not home ... to the police-station for interrogation in this matter of attempted extortion. You too, Parkington, are in the joke, so come along too.'

Parkington came, the case admitting of no argument.

Upstairs again, the Detective-Sergeant said, 'We'll want those notes of yours typed as soon as possible, Miss Pritchard. We'll go round to the station. I daresay you prefer your own typewriter. Bring them round as soon as you have them done, and we'll want your shorthand too. Just in case of any doubt. We'll take the tape recorder too, though in any case I heard all I need to know.'

There was no fight left in the Parkingtons.

Dinah would not meet Anthony's eyes. She looked everywhere else. When she did, she wanted it to be without witnesses. All these others thought from what they had heard that she was engaged to Russell Milgrove. Anthony himself thought it. But ... she had heard him declare himself. She need not pretend any longer. He'd said he'd fallen in love with her when first they met ... long before he'd known she was interested in Russell ... It was all just part of the malicious streak in both the Milgroves. And she had believed it.

Somewhere inside her the realization was growing. It was going to reach a climax soon ... when their eyes really met.

She wouldn't be able to hide her feelings any longer. Till then he wouldn't know she loved him too. He'd have to wait ... and she'd have to wait till she typed these exceedingly long, terrible, glorious notes.

Had it ever happened before, she wondered dazedly, that a girl actually took down her future husband's declaration of love? Surely not. Never, never, never before in this deliciously crazy, wonderful world.

She typed furiously, called a taxi, departed for the police station.

It seemed as if they would never be finished. Dinah was tremendously impressed with the thorough

processes of the law, even, in the back of her mind, fascinated by it, but she was conscious all the time of a mounting impatience, a compelling longing to look directly into Anthony's eyes. She went on avoiding his look, knowing that he would think it added up to only one thing ... that she was embarrassed to know he loved her.

Then suddenly, mercifully, it was all over. They rose. Detective-Sergeant Blundell went out. A young constable rang for a taxi for them. 'For four people,' he said.

Dinah leaned over and deliberately clutched his arm. 'Not for four, for *two* ,' she said. 'I want to see Mr. Bryn-Morgan by himself before we go back to the shop.'

Anthony swung round, looked at her. She looked away.

Airini and Sandy Wilson looked at each other rather apprehensively, a little sadly. Dinah wanted to say to them, 'It's going to be all right; gloriously right, just wait and see,' but she couldn't. Not with Anthony there.

She said to the constable, 'Would you mind letting us have this room for about ten minutes?'

The three of them went out quickly.

It was a severely utilitarian room. The windows looked out to the railway station opposite. Anthony went across to it, stood looking out, unseeing, Dinah believed, at the very first railway engine of the provincial days, Josephine by name, where she sat, surrounded by whaling-pots.

'You heard, of course,' he stated in a flat voice, 'that I love you. You even took it down, I suppose.' He swallowed. 'You - you mustn't let it make you sad, Dinah. Other people have loved ... and lost. And Russell Milgrove needs a strong wife like you. He'd just better make you happy, that's all.' He sighed. 'And I do wish you very happy, dear. No more to say ... except that now the shouting and the tumult have died I can't help feeling sorry for those two. Maybe after all it would have been kinder to have just scared them. Not done anything official.'

'That *isn't* all, Mr. Anthony,' said Dinah in a clear voice. 'I felt you *must* charge them, must clear your

name. I can't have those sort of rumours floating about you for the rest of your life. We must think of the children. Our children. Those little boys with ginger hair and chipped knees and freckled noses. Those little boys with hot tempers who'll probably push the Milgrove brats into frog-pools times without number. And serve them right too!"

Her voice suddenly wobbled. 'Tony, I'm - I'm proposing to you ... in a bare little room in a police-station ... and you won't even turn round, you beast! You said that day in the bush above Canongate that love ought to come like – like trumpets on the wind. Trust *me*... *I* only get train-whistles! How could you think I'd marry Russell once I met you? I broke it off two weeks ago, you idiot.'

He swung round, his eyes still unbelieving, meeting hers across the yards of wooden floor between them. Suddenly the moment Dinah had dreamed of came, his blue eyes burned into her green ones... then the space was no longer there, he was holding her close, he was laughing, he was exultant.

He said, 'Dinah darling!' and bent his head.

The door flew open and Detective-Sergeant Blundell was framed in the opening.

He ought to have crept quietly away. He ought to have shut the door and stood guard over it.

He didn't.

He said: 'Ho! Ho!' and grinned, then in a voice that brought everyone in the outer office to their feet.

'Well, just look here, chaps... for once the police station brings about a happy ending!'